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GALLICA  
AND OTHER ESSAYS

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*  
**THE IDYLLS OF THEOCRITUS**

Translated into English Verse

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# GALLICA

## AND OTHER ESSAYS

BY

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'Difficile est proprie communia dicere'

HORACE, *Ars Poetica*

LONDON

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

AND NEW YORK

1895

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TO THE MEMORY OF  
MATTHEW ARNOLD  
THESE ESSAYS ARE GRATEFULLY DEDICATED

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## P R E F A C E

THESE essays were written at various times and in various moods during the last ten years. They do not pretend to form any unity except in so far that the larger set concerns topics of French literature. Most of them have already seen the light of ephemeral publication; some were read before the Speculative Society of Edinburgh, and one or two now come before the world for the first time. On looking over them, I am painfully conscious that some of the earlier ones (earlier, I mean, in point of time, not in point of place) show marked traces of immaturity and of imitation. These faults are almost unavoidable by a youthful critic, and may, perhaps, be pardoned on the score of enthusiasm; but if I have failed to show some fresh aspects of the subjects which I treat, then indeed I merit censure for daring to 'hold a farthing candle to the sun.'

My best thanks are due to that excellent French scholar, Mr. J. A. L. Kunz, for kindly consenting to revise the first part of these essays, and for giving me hints on some points. I have also to thank my friend, Mr. P. H. Pritchard, for lavish care bestowed on my proof-sheets.

J. H. H.

EDINBURGH, *May* 1895.

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GALLICA

A



## SOME REASONS FOR LEARNING FRENCH

It is much to be feared that the study of Greek will, despite Professor Jebb's optimistic belief to the contrary, eventually all but die out from the educational *curricula* of this country. In France it has practically done so already. It no longer forms a necessary part of the *Baccalauréat* degree; and there are not wanting signs to show that in this country, too, Greek will one day cease being an obligatory subject in the Arts' degree of our Universities. Whether this is a matter for regret or rejoicing, is perhaps an open question. One may be a devoted Hellenist, and yet fail to see why all who aspire to University success should be forced to acquire the 'beggarly elements' of Greek. There will always remain a cultured minority who will see to it that the study of the most beautiful language and literature that the world has ever known shall not die out.

But, for the majority of educated men, some substitute for the language and literature of ancient Hellas must be found. And, with all deference to the Teutonically-disposed among us, that substitute is to be found in the study of French. Why this is so, it shall be the purpose of this essay to illustrate. We all know what the leading characteristics of the Greek genius at its best were—lightness, delicacy, moderation,

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charm. Others could be named, but these were on the whole the distinguishing features. Now, it is largely to these very qualities that French owes its European vogue; for, after all, in spite of Germany's military prestige and her pre-eminence in music, the civilised nations of the Continent still turn to France for their literature. The average Englishman of the *homme sensuel moyen* type, which is everywhere as a rule cynically disposed, would maintain that the reason for this vogue is not so far to seek. And no doubt he would have something to say for himself. But I am not here referring to the success enjoyed by the great and grimy Monsieur Zola—that curious mixture, in the person of a *brave bourgeois*, of the poet, the man of science, the moralist, and—well, the ‘philistine.’ Doubtless *he* owes his popularity in large measure—and nowhere more than amongst ourselves—to the very qualities which the disinterested lover of literature rather deprecates. But I am here referring to the beautiful works of literary art which France has just ceased—if indeed she has quite ceased—to lavish on the world. French novels of the best type, French essays, French memoirs, French plays, where are to be found better than these? ‘True,’ my critic may say, ‘but these are the lighter forms of literature. What about the more serious? Can France be said to lead the world in science, philosophy, art?’ Well, perhaps not; but it still remains true that any book whose author desires a European vogue for it, must be translated into French. French is still the great mediating language of Europe. All, or almost all, cultured people in other countries read French as a second language. This is not true of German, or of any other Euro-

pean tongue. In fact, French may be said to hold the same position with regard to other languages as Greek at one time did. But the analogy must not be pressed too far. Still, just as an educated Roman in the days of Cicero read Greek, so do educated Englishmen, Germans or Russians, read French. It may very well be that French is not the best language for some things, but it is unquestionably the best language for most things. It is bright and vivacious, and is therefore *par excellence* the language of conversation. It is logical and lucid, and is therefore the best language for science. It is subtle, and therefore the best language for psychology. And surely conversation, novels, and science are considerable agents in life. For poetry, it is not so well adapted as English, but it is not so ill adapted as most Englishmen fancy. It requires a very intimate knowledge of French, however, to understand the charm of French poetry. An Englishman always boggles at the words of Latin origin, which are also English words, and for which we have simpler Saxon equivalents. In a later essay I shall go into this question of French poetic diction. At present I wish to write a plea for the study of French in general. The French have a saying, which naturally we do not accept, that French is the language of men, English the language of birds. They also add that Italian is the language of women, and German the language of horses. With these two last appreciations we shall not concern ourselves; but why should English be regarded as the language of birds? We are accustomed to think of our native tongue as a manly one compared with French; yet the Frenchman talks of the *gazouillement*, the 'twittering,' of the English language. How should

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this be? Well, the reason is not so very far to seek. English is full to excess of sibilant sounds—*s* and *ch* abound in it. French, on the other hand, is full of sonorous, nasal sounds, like *on*, *en*, etc., which give to the language a kind of metallic clang. Théophile Gautier it is, I think, who compares the sound of French to the rippling of chain-armour. There can be no doubt that French is the more sonorous, the more masculine language of the two. What it lacks is the whispering sweetness of English, that sound as of wind through a reed-bed. This is given to English by its sibilants and its indefinite vowel-sounds. In French all is clear and hard-cut: there are no vague sounds in it. Even the famous shibboleth *grenouille* is not really a vague set of sounds. It is simplicity itself when compared with (say) the apparently simple English word *hair*. Try to explain to an intelligent Frenchman the exact way to pronounce *hair*, and you will find that you must modify your opinion about the simplicity and strength of the English tongue.

But this is a digression. It is with the matter, not with the sound, of the French language that we wish to deal. What are the reasons that make one assert that French is the proper language to take the place of Greek in the education of those to whom Greek is to be denied? Well, in the first place, French is essentially the language of pure intelligence, just as Greek was. As Voltaire says, '*Tout ce qui n'est pas clair n'est pas français.*' German has, doubtless, many advantages. It has endless ways of expressing itself. It is the most pliable of tongues, but it lacks that logical, clear-cut exactitude of phrase which makes French so much better a vehicle for the

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intelligence. We all remember Mark Twain's humorous chapter on the German language, and have all more or less sympathised with his criticism. German is rather a helpless language for some purposes. None but the great writers seem able to write it simply and clearly—*et encore*, as the French say. English also has many advantages; but it has the disadvantage of being our native tongue. Moreover, it has practically no grammar. Now, an invertebrate language has many obvious practical merits; but, as an instrument of mental discipline, it cannot be compared with a synthetic or partially synthetic language. Severity of syntax is another feature rather wanting in English, and this French has in a less degree only than Latin, which must ever remain the best educational language for Europeans. Nothing can conceivably take the place of Latin in the educational *curriculum* of our schools; but French can make a very passable substitute for Greek. It possesses, as we have seen, logical clearness. It has also brightness, lightness, grace. These qualities are by universal consent allowed it. It has also universality. In spite of Prince Bismarck's gruff refusal to treat with M. Thiers in French, French is likely to endure as the language of diplomacy. It is the language of courtesy, of urbanity. It is the least barbarous of modern languages. It is the most fixed and polished. Paris is still the centre of Europe from the intellectual point of view. The graceful essayist and fine poet to whose memory these pages are dedicated has spoken of

‘France, famed for all great arts, in none supreme’;

and although this criticism seems to me strangely to understate the truth with regard to different arts at different times,

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yet it is precisely this all-round excellence that makes Paris so eminently the central city of Europe, the *ville de lumière*. Still, there is one art in which the French must surely be reckoned first—first, that is to say, of modern nations—and that is the dramatic art. The dramatic art of the Greeks stands apart, aloft, while Shakespeare's art is as nowhere compared with his poetical genius. But as playwrights, and, it might be added, as play-actors, who can equal the nation that has given us a Racine, a Molière, a Victor Hugo; or, again, a Talma, a Rachel, a Coquelin, a Bernhardt? No doubt we have our own praiseworthy little modern dramatists, and our own praiseworthy little modern plays; but one of the penalties one has to endure for knowing superior work is the discontent one feels with the inferior. Many excellent, and even intelligent people take great pleasure in such suburban 'moralities' as 'The Second Mrs. Tanqueray'—to name a late notorious instance. To one familiar with French plays, such a taste must naturally appear crude. With the exception, perhaps, of Mr Wilde's plays, and a very few others, which have somewhat redeemed English drama of the last decade from hopeless dulness and sordid vulgarity, what has there been of native growth worth a serious thought from a serious man? Did I say decade? Make it a century, and with doubtful exceptions here and there, the statement still remains true. Our last dramatic writer of eminence was Sheridan; but in France, Victor Hugo died but a few years ago, and Sardou still lives and writes, as do also other remarkable playwrights, fortunately for our stage. No, there can be no serious comparison between our modern theatre and the



French. Our poets do not write plays, and our playwrights do not write poetry. Prose, and unliterary prose, has been our dramatic medium for long. Then, as to our actors. With the exception of a wayward genius, a man of talent or temperament here and there, and a few rather more than meritorious mediocrities, who is there on our stage that can compare with the artists of the *Comédie française*? As for the rank and file of our actors, some of them young men of good birth, breeding and education, they are, well, *where* are they? I have seen better all-round acting in a provincial German playhouse than is usually to be found in many London theatres. This is a simple and humiliating fact. Perhaps, when French ideas have permeated the nation more, we shall have a State-supported theatre and something in the way of training analogous to the *Conservatoire*. Till then, we must remain in thralldom to that bright particular 'star' the actor-manager, and until some men of genuine literary ability take to play-writing, we shall have an endless succession of 'Mrs. Tanquerays' and 'Dancing Girls.'

Then in fiction. Putting aside Scott, whom have we had this century that can stand beside Balzac, Dumas, Victor Hugo, George Sand? Surely not Thackeray, surely not George Eliot. Nothing, to my thinking, more denotes the insular mind than the belief that Thackeray or George Eliot are writers of the first order of genius—Thackeray, with what Mr. Henley, in his bold, bright little book *Views and Reviews*, so well calls his 'club-room window aspect of life'; with his *parti pris* that if one is clever one is most likely to be a knave, and that if one is good one is nearly

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certain to be a fool, his genuine yet shallow cynicism, his want of charm; George Eliot with her terrible moral earnestness about trifles, and her still more terrible, because more obtruded, learnedness. When I think of the poetic energy and flow, of the large mild comprehension of life, of the artistic charm of George Sand, I feel that our George Eliot is not in the same world. It seems difficult to us now to understand how people should have puzzled over the question as to whether George Eliot was a man or a woman. We have all grown so familiar now with the manner of the lady-novelist, that such dubiety could not arise, for all our women-writers, with perhaps the exception of the Brontës, betray their sex. But George Sand is a male writer; or, perhaps, it would be truer to say that she almost alone of her sex in fiction has been able to reach a plane of art where there is neither male nor female. The number of women who have done this could be counted on the fingers of one hand. From Sappho the Lesbian to Emily Brontë, the list is but a small one.

As these essays are merely of a literary order, it would not come within my scope to speak of French as a vehicle for philosophical or scientific writing. Suffice it to say that French acts as a sieve in winnowing the wheat from the chaff, when learned works are translated into it. It is intolerant of obscurity, slovenliness, carelessness, either in thought or expression. This was once brought clearly home to me. I read a book which, I believe, made some noise in its day in this country among half-educated people. It was called *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*, and I read it in a French translation. The medium was a fatal one to choose, for the radical

and inherent inadequacy of the argument was most strikingly brought out. That is the worst of French. It is like the sunlight, and no intellectual vapour can subsist in it. This dry, bright quality makes it prove fatal to our misleaders in things of the mind. Books like the one I have mentioned—and we have lately had many of the type—could never have much success in France, that land of clear thought and incisive speech. No; it is quite certain that if a knowledge of French became general, our clever pseudo-men-of-science would cease to command popularity. What would happen to the works of the Duke of Argyll, that nobleman who devotes his declining years to refuting the facts of nature and cultivating the pedestrian muse, it is woeful to conjecture. And where would the voluminous but unconvincing writings of Mr. Gladstone be,—his essays on obsolete questions in theology, and his mistranslations of Horace's love-odes,—alas! alas! where indeed? The unabashed phalanx of those whom Mr. Huxley terms 'the Reconcilers' would sink into silence. In fact, the 'cuckoo-cloudland' of our speculation would vanish away.

What a gain in clear thinking our nation would acquire if everybody had a knowledge of French! The compromising type of mind that is quite prepared to accept one set of miracles and not another, the divided mind that keeps its theology in this compartment of the brain, and its science in that,—all the many forms of mental confusion that flourish so freely among us would be dissipated. Men would learn to face the facts of nature and of life with more freedom, more frankness. Our insular pruderies and mawkishness, and our

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equally insular 'plain speaking,' would have to go. Ugliness and untruth would find a puissant foe in the study of French, for, be it noted, the French mind is in some ways a more serious mind than ours. It hates error with a more intense hatred; it is not so tolerant of the inadequate as ours. Our sense of humour, supposed by us to be a peculiarly British sense, is a great bar to our mental growth; for it is that sense which in its effects is most inimical to passion, to conviction, to the truth of logical extremes. A really humorous man is apt to have a deficient sense of beauty and a kindly tolerance for stupidity, ugliness, error. What he dislikes most is reasoned conviction; for the conviction born of prejudice he has much sympathy. He has a contempt for the poetry of passion, and the passion of poetry. Devotion, fervour, intensity, are his bugbears.

Now, this humorous attitude of mind is not common in French literature. Not that it is altogether absent. Molière has a vein of genuine humour in him. Indeed, some genealogists maintain that he was of Scottish extraction, which, with deference to Sydney Smith, might perhaps account for it. But as a rule, the sense of humour is conspicuously absent from French literature. This is one of the reasons why that literature would prove so useful to us. It would stimulate and strengthen our unexacting mentality, and make it acquire grit, virility. French is the virile tongue of Europe. French literature is the virile literature: it is the literature of power, passion and clear thinking. It is also most emphatically the language of criticism. What have we done in literary criticism which can for one moment compare with the colossal work of

Sainte-Beuve? Where else shall we find that buoyant charm, that loving minuteness, that delicate grace, that large sanity, that loving appreciation of what is excellent? Nowhere in our literature, and perhaps nowhere in any literature. The Saxon and Teutonic minds are too violent, too wanting in subtlety, too impatient of fine distinctions for this art of criticism. We either hate our author or we love him, and in either case we are indiscriminating. Not so the French mind. It sifts, examines, appreciates; it neither loves nor hates *en bloc*.

Yes, the study of French, if made general and obligatory, would work miracles. We should begin to question many of our opinions, manners and institutions so seriously, that perhaps in time we might improve some of them. The diligent study of the *Code Napoléon*, for example, would make us wonder whether, after all, our own system of jurisprudence is as good as it might be. We should certainly put marks of interrogation after some of our statutes, and ask whether, in view of the fact that the most civilised of nations has no statutes of the kind on *its* lawbook, *we* are justified in conserving such relics of the Middle Ages. All kinds of burning questions would be looked at from other points of view. In fact, humaner ideas concerning human relations would infallibly be quickened in us.

In matters educational, too, how much might we learn! Our venerable institution of the clerical headmaster, with his narrow outlook on life, his stunted sense of most things that make for perfection, his subservience to the average opinion of the people who support his school, his semi-savage, semi-*bourgeois* notions of morals, his belief in the birch as one of the few agencies not himself that make for righteousness, his

inability to apprehend the finer strands of character, his episcopal scholarship, his archi-episcopal sense of respectability, his general woodenness, that institution, too, might have to disappear from the ideal vision of our 'purged, considerate minds'—not to be replaced, let us hope, by that of the robustious or of the terribly-in-earnest layman. In fact, there would be no end to the new ideas that would assail us on every side. We might question the most hoary institutions in Church and State. Most of us have done that in our time, however, and some of us have ceased seeing all things in Radicalism. But it is conceivable that we should ask ourselves with greater insistence, why wealth is so unequally distributed in Britain, and why we allow our population to increase so far beyond the bounds of decent subsistence. We might come to inquire why Scottish Universities delight to confer the degree of LL.D. on local nobodies. We might ask why the title of Professor is by law allowed to be defamed by every charlatan. We should wonder why all that the State can and ought to do is not done. We might even come not to feel ashamed at having refused to read the *Heavenly Dodo*, and *The Yellow Twins*.

But to return to my main contention, that French is the proper language to take the place of Greek in the education of those to whom Greek is to be denied. Naturally, nothing can really take the place of Homer—this must be granted, of course, and it is a pity that those boys, 'fortunati nimium sua si bona nôrint,' who are to learn Greek, should not read little else in that language but Homer till they are sixteen or seventeen, for no amount of Attic Greek can compensate for ignorance of *him*.

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He is the first Greek writer boys really like, just as Horace is the first Latin one. But a course of Racine, Molière, Michelet, and Taine could quite conceivably have almost as good an effect on a boy's mental culture as Euripides, Aristophanes, Herodotus and Xenophon. Indeed, in the case of most boys, such a course would have more effect, as they would read more of the French than of the Greek, and bulk counts for a good deal. In reading the writers I have mentioned, they would have the sense of a long historical continuity which no amount of German reading could give them. They would feel that they were in the main stream of European literature; at least their teachers would be bound to make them feel that. The sense for what is classical, in the best meaning of the word, would be quickened in them—the sense for what is artistic in style. This is where, it seems to me, one of the chief reasons for studying French can be urged. Style, the artistic use of words, the quality which, above all others, gives permanence to a work of art, that is what we find so conspicuous in French, as in Greek literature; and the best French style, like the best Greek style, seems natural, spontaneous. Yet, if you examine into it you find that it is not really so, that it is an exquisitely cultivated thing, and that its spontaneity is the spontaneity of a musician, who has with much labour conquered the difficulties of his instrument. This beautiful quality of style is one so often lacking in our prose writing, that it is very desirable a young student should read a literature in which it is conspicuously present. Even if he only read French newspapers, he would acquire an insight into the use of words which all the 'leaders' in *The Times* for years would fail to give him.

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Our press is business-like in tone, the French press is artistic—that is the difference. We think it of vast importance (as it really is *not*) that we should have red-hot articles on the events of each day. The French press is more leisurely, and gives one an artistic little essay some days after date. This is as it should be. We do not really want—that is to say, intelligent people do not really want—to have an editor's hastily-formed opinion thrust down our throats. It is a brutal proceeding, and the sensitive mind resents it.

It may be that the French nation is doomed to extinction, and that the future is for the Anglo-Saxon. The doctrine of the survival of the fittest is possibly true, but it is not a cheering one for the lover of perfection, for fitness seems mainly to mean physiological fitness, and what Walt Whitman calls 'the divine average.' I like Walt Whitman, but I do not like the 'divine average.' What does the 'divine average' know of, or care for, artistic perfection, or, indeed, any fine excellence? Nothing! To the 'divine average' the crude reproduction in literature of its own uninteresting features will ever prove more acceptable than the vision of the 'faculty divine.' In fiction it will have its realists, in religion its Reconcilers, in philosophy its charlatans, and in the drama an endless succession of suburban moralities.

The disappearance of the French nation would mean the disappearance of the one nation that has, as a nation, a vital feeling for art. That would surely be a loss, for which the unlimited spread of the Anglo-Saxon race could not compensate. Still, I am not optimistic enough to believe that this is *not* what the Fates have in store for us.



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The best French literature, like the best Greek, has an artistic charm, a lightness and delicacy, which are to be found in no other. It has also *distinction*, that great quality which is so fast dying out of our literature. Intellectually, the French are the Greeks of the modern world; mentally, they are even defter, subtler, clearer. Their literature has many affinities to Greek literature, and the qualities which constitute those affinities are precisely those which our British youth most requires.

## CORNEILLE

WHICH is the better standard to apply to a work of literary art,—that afforded by an historical survey of the particular literary form in question, or that of perfection as derived from a comparison with other finished productions in the same field at different epochs and in different countries? Of these the former is of easier, though in some cases, where intermediate links are lacking, of impossible application. It is a matter of less difficulty to trace the steps by which a work of art has been evolved, and to note growth or decay in the process, than to pronounce a judgment on its merits compared with those of others in respect of perfection. For to do *this* implies that we share in what Aristotle calls the *ὀρθὸς λόγος*, and have a notion of what perfection means. Now, that would perhaps be a hazardous presumption. Nevertheless, one must run the risk of being deemed both rash and wrong, and give one's critical opinion on a question of æsthetics for what it is worth. Reserving, however, this discussion till it presents itself naturally, let us, in the meantime, endeavour to see what results we can obtain by applying the historical method to the tragedies of Corneille.

Horace tells us, in his *Ars Poetica*, how Thespis used to lug his wagon about the country, his company of actors giving

their representations on this rude stage, and only one personage varying the monotony of choric song by individual action. Then came Æschylus with his two personages, his masks and cloaks and buskins. Sophocles followed, with his three personages, and in his hands the Greek drama attained its full development. Now, here we have definite steps in advance which we can demonstrate and appreciate. From the crude beginnings of Thespis, we arrive at the mellow completeness of the 'Œdipus' of Sophocles. In other branches of poetry we can hardly apply such principles as these. The spirit of lyric song bloweth where it listeth, and no man can say that this manifestation is better than that, because of advantage of method or of means. What most ardent votary of Progress would maintain that the songs of Tennyson or Burns show an 'advance' on those of Sappho or Catullus? Circumstances, environment, racial aptitude and disposition, are of course here, as in everything else, of vast importance as conditions of artistic creation; but the passion of the lyric poet bursts all barriers of convention, and utters its joy and sorrow in unpremeditated lay. Not so can the dramatic writer work. He, too, is bound by the aforementioned conditions of artistic production, but in addition to these he has the conventional exigencies of the stage to hamper him. Not even Shakespeare's self can franchise the 'uno'erleaped mountains of necessity' that surround the playwright's craft. His characters must, on the whole, be true to themselves, and not be mere spokesmen of the dramatist. The words and actions of his personages must be such as may become men and women similarly placed, and not run random riot. In short,

the dramatist must merge his personality in the creations of his fancy. Again, the course of his plot must follow the principles of human conduct and the probabilities of life. Of these one can judge with much greater certainty than of the emotion expressed by the lyric poet.

Now applying this historical method to Corneille, and, leaving the standard of absolute perfection to be spoken of later on, what results do we obtain? Let us compare him with his own predecessors in France, and let us inquire into the state of the French drama before his advent, endeavouring, as far as possible, to put ourselves in the position of his contemporaries. To enable us to do this, a historical retrospect is necessary.

In France, during the fifteenth century, there were three kinds of dramatic performance, which contained the germs of tragedy, comedy, and melodrama. These were (1) *Les Mystères*, (2) *Les Soties*, (3) *Les Moralités*. By *Mystères* were meant plays founded on the stories of the Bible and on the lives of prophets and apostles. The principal personages represented were God, Christ, the Devil, Angels and the Virgin Mary. The theatre was divided into three compartments. Up aloft were the celestial regions; occupying the middle zone was earth; and below, on the *rez-de-chaussée* raged the nether fires. The action took place in the middle compartment, and the *dénouement*, according as the hero was virtuous or vicious, up above or down below. We still find traces of this ancient poetical justice in the red fire and pasteboard clouds of modern times. The dialogue of these *Mystères* was, for the most part, made up of quotations from the Scriptures.

Only one band of actors, who went under the name of *Les Confrères de la Passion*, was allowed to perform them. The Passion Play of Ammergau is the most celebrated survival of the Mysteries of the Middle Ages.

The *Soties* were performed by a band of players who styled themselves *Les Enfants Sans-Souci*, and were of a very popular and often outrageous description. Contemporary personages were travestied and ridiculed; and so far did the virulence of personal abuse go, that enactments had to be passed to suppress it. It is said that Louis XI. could not endure the pert allusions of the *Prince des Sots*, as the chief of the band was called, and threatened to hang the offender.

Thirdly, there were the *Moralités*, which were played by a company styling themselves *Les Clercs de la Basoche*, or, as we should say, the 'Junior Bar.' The peculiarity of these *Moralités* was that they combined the characteristics of the *Mystères* and the *Soties*. The personages represented were chiefly saints and such vague personifications as *Bien-avisé*, *Mal-avisé*, *Honte-de-dire-ses-péchés*.

It was in the middle of the sixteenth century that the dramatic poets of France began to look to Greek and Roman literature for their models. The Renaissance had set strongly in, and the *Pléiade* had arisen. Ronsard, the brightest star of that famous constellation, translated the 'Plutus' of Aristophanes. A few years later, Jodelle wrote a 'Cléopâtre' on the Greek model, and was hailed by his brethren as a demi-god. It is even said that they presented him on that occasion with a goat, which was duly sacrificed with all the rites of Paganism. Nowadays, we should hardly be able to read through

the long, weary monologues of this once celebrated play. Frenchmen of the sixteenth century must have been a more enduring and long-suffering race than their descendants.

The next name of importance in the history of the French drama is Garnier. Instead of having recourse to Greek models, this writer imitated Seneca, and he was the first to take the subjects of his plays from Scripture. His writings, like those of his master, abound in fine sentiments which were so much prized in those days that they were printed prominently between brackets. However, much as Jodelle and Garnier were esteemed by the erudite, the mass of the people wanted something with more life and action in it. Accordingly, towards the end of the sixteenth century, there arose a playwright who was prepared to gratify this taste at the expense of all artistic propriety. Alexandre Hardy invented nothing. He pilfered right and left from Italian pastorals, Spanish dramas and classical writings. Unfortunately he chiefly copied the faults of all his models, but he had a saving vigour and *verve* of action which made his plays popular. It is said that he wrote something like twelve hundred of them, so we are driven to the conclusion that moneymaking was his main object. For twenty years he enchanted the Parisian public with his facile productions, but at last people grew weary of them and sighed for something severer and more correct. Already Malherbe, that 'lord of language,' had given *ex cathedra* his laws of versification and correct diction. The three famous unities were struggling for recognition, and Corneille had begun to write.

Before entering upon a survey of the literary career of this

eminent writer, let us first look into the question of the 'three unities,' round which have been waged more battles than round Troy. We all know what the three unities are: the unity of time, the unity of place, and the unity of action. Aristotle was generally (and erroneously) regarded as the originator of these three unities, and they therefore came to be honoured with a sort of superstitious cult. As Schlegel, in his seventeenth lecture on Dramatic Literature, says: 'Every Frenchman who has sucked in his Boileau with his mother's milk considers himself a born champion of the dramatic unities, much in the same way that the kings of England since Henry VIII. are hereditary defenders of the faith.' Now Aristotle (as all will remember who have read his brilliant little treatise 'Περὶ Ποιητικῆς') only mentions two unities, the unity of action and the unity of time. And even this latter is only incidentally mentioned, and not in the least laid down as a formal canon. He merely says that tragedy, as far as possible, seeks to circumscribe itself within one revolution of the sun, or to exceed it but little. Now, it is just a question here whether Aristotle is not referring to the *real* time taken up by the trilogy. Even granting that the time referred to is the *imaginary* time, we are not to infer that Aristotle intended this remark (which was after all only *generally* true of the tragedy of his time) to be regarded as a hard and fast rule for all succeeding writers. Moreover, we cannot feel quite certain what one revolution of the sun means. Does it mean twelve hours or twenty-four? The unity of action is universally admitted to be essential to a tragedy. But what precisely is meant by the unity of action

is a question which has raised, and will continue to raise, endless disputes. In the first place, what do we imply by action? Can a string of unconnected occurrences be regarded as action, or must the chain of cause and effect be always there? Again, does unity of action proscribe subordinate plots, and if not wholly, to what extent? To attempt to answer such questions would lead us into a world of speculation quite beyond our ken and the limits of this essay. So far, however, as this vexed question goes, we can say that French tragedy is nearer the Greek than English tragedy is. To Greek and Frenchman alike, that vast array of personages introduced on his stage by Shakespeare would appear monstrous. Whether or no, however, such array could be comprehended under some wider and transcendental unity, is a question which, in the words of Aristotle, 'belongs to another line of inquiry.' Of the unity of place Aristotle says not a word, and, as a matter of fact, it was frequently disregarded by the Greeks themselves, and it has no basis in reason or dramatic truth. So much for the unities. Let us now turn to Corneille.

Pierre Corneille was born at Rouen in the year 1606. His father destined him for the bar, but the young poet soon broke loose from legal trammels and devoted himself to the serious prosecution of his art. His first effort in the field of literature was inspired by a curious episode. A friend of his took him one day to visit his lady-love. The impressionable young poet was fascinated by her charms, and succeeded in inspiring a like passion in the heart of the young lady. This somewhat disloyal conduct received an undeserved reward, for Corneille completely ousted his friend and rival, and instead of showing



contrition, proceeded to write a little play on the subject. It was entitled 'Mélite,' and scored a prodigious success. The plot of this famous comedy is one of astounding complexity, in fact, a regular *casse-tête*, and shows the clearest traces of Spanish influence. Several others followed in quick succession—'Clitandre,' 'La Veuve,' 'La Galerie du Palais,' 'La Suivante,' 'La Place Royale.' They all showed talent superior to that of most playwrights of the day, but the genius of the poet had not yet declared itself.

Rotrou, a dramatic poet and contemporary of Corneille, found no difficulty in detecting exceptional merit in those early efforts, and, in a rhymed address, welcomed the advent of a poet so full of promise. Richelieu, who imagined that poetry was one of his strong points, took this promising young aspirant by the hand, and bade him collaborate with the literary secretaries whom he employed in filling in the outlines of the tragedies that he sketched for them. But we know from our reminiscences of Horace what happens to the man who tries to put Pegasus in harness. The young poet began to kick out, and in one of the plays, an act of which had been intrusted to him by the Cardinal, he fairly broke the traces. The autocratic minister complained that Corneille wanted the *esprit de suite*, or spirit of cohesion, and sent him back to Rouen. Corneille accepted his dismissal with a good grace and retired into private life. Henceforward he devoted himself to the study of his art and to the composition of his dramatic poems. In connection with his stay at Rouen, his biography offers glimpses of a family life for which French society of any period whatever seldom obtains credit in this

country, as the Saxon race usually claims a monopoly of the domestic virtues. He shared his dwelling with his brother Thomas, who also was a tragedy-writer of repute. Pierre and Thomas had married two sisters, and there were children in both families. The two brothers worked in studies situated one above the other. A small trap-door connected the two apartments. The younger, Thomas, had a singular facility in finding rhymes. Pierre, on the other hand, was a slow worker, and had often to rack his brains in order to find the right word. In his distress he would go and lift the trap and shout out, 'Thomas, a noun in *aïse*, or in *ise* or in *ose*,' and the ready Thomas would send up the required commodity.

Corneille's first tragedy, '*Médée*,' appeared in 1635. In it some marks of his distinctive genius are to be found. Martin, in his *Histoire de France*, makes the following remark about this play: 'Son génie s'annonça bientôt par quelques traits sublimes de sa *Médée*. Le fameux vers

" Dans un si grand revers que vous reste-t-il ?  
Moi ! "

fut le "je pense, donc je suis" de la tragédie française et annonça ce théâtre héroïque qui allait se fonder comme la philosophie sur la puissance de la personnalité humaine.' It was somewhat coldly received, but in the year following appeared the '*Cid*,' which took Paris by storm. Never, in the annals of the drama, had such a brilliant success been scored. It is very hard for us nowadays to realise and understand the *furor* of delight which hailed this play. The good citizens of Paris went raving mad with joy, and even in the remotest provinces the proverb *beau comme le Cid* was in everybody's

mouth. The play was rapidly translated into most European languages, and Corneille had the pleasure of beholding copies of these translations lying on his desk. In the midst of this universal acclamation there was one dissentient and dissatisfied voice. Richelieu had never cordially forgiven Corneille for his want of *esprit de suite*; and now that all men were rejoicing over the discovery of this wonderful writer, his Eminence, in high dudgeon, and like a second Athanasius *contra mundum*, cursed the 'Cid' in the name of the trinity of unities, and bade his newly-formed Academy endorse the curse. This the Forty Immortals did under protest, and with considerable abatement. That worthy man, but mediocre poet, Chapelain, drew up the famous pamphlet entitled *Sentiments de l'Académie sur le Cid*, in which Corneille's first masterpiece was damned with faint praise. But little did the public heed the chilling criticism of the erudite. In the words of Boileau—

'En vain contre le Cid un ministre se ligue ;  
Tout Paris pour Chimène a les yeux de Rodrigue.'

Let us examine in detail this famous play, and endeavour to see why the Parisians of 1636 were so thrilled and delighted by it. The plot of the 'Cid' is taken from the Spanish of Guillem de Castro, who, in turn, derived it from history and the popular traditions of Castille. In his play, which is called 'Las Mocedades del Cid,' the patriotic element is given more importance than Corneille judged would interest his hearers, and accordingly the latter substituted the strife between Passion and Duty for the ardour of Patriotism. The plot is briefly as follows:—

An old Spanish noble, called Don Diègue, has just been

selected by the king as tutor for the young Prince of Castille. Enraged at this sign of preference, another and younger noble, called Don Gomès, has some bitter words with Don Diègue, to whom, in a moment of anger, he gives a buffet on the ear. The aged warrior is unable through infirmity to retaliate, and furious through indignation, bids his son, Don Rodrigue, avenge the insult. Now it so happens that Rodrigue is in love with Don Gomès' daughter Chimène, and so he finds himself in the cruel dilemma of losing either his love or his honour. Finally his nobler instincts gain the victory, and he challenges Don Gomès to mortal combat and slays him. Don Diègue is delighted at his son's prowess; but Chimène, who, notwithstanding, still loves Rodrigue, is distracted with grief at her father's death, and beseeches the king to cause her lover to be slain. The prayers of Don Diègue, however, induce the king to defer judgment. Meanwhile, an invasion by the Moors takes place, and Rodrigue marches to meet them. He defeats them utterly, and makes two of their kings prisoners. By them he is hailed by the title of 'Cid,' which means, in the language of the Moors, 'Lord.' Once more Chimène demands justice of the king. This time the king grants her a champion to fight in single combat with Rodrigue on condition that she shall marry the victor. Don Sanche, an unsuccessful rival of Rodrigue, accepts the office, but is vanquished in the fight. Still Chimène's scruples are not satisfied, and so the king bids Rodrigue carry his victorious arms into Africa, promising him the hand of Chimène on his return. Here the play ends, but we can easily foresee that the young lady will finally be appeased and Rodrigue rewarded for his love and heroism.

Now, here is a very charming and interesting argument, and most ably has Corneille worked it out. There is a freshness and youthfulness of vigour about his method of treatment which carries one along. Passion, chivalry, courage, success,—these are precisely the elements which go to make up a fascinating youthful personality, and Rodrigue is the embodiment of all these. We cannot but feel keenly for him in his painful dilemma, when he has to choose between offending his father or his mistress; and then how eloquently he laments his sad plight!

‘Percé jusques au fond du cœur

D’une atteinte imprévue aussi bien que mortelle,’ etc.

—Act 1. Scene 10.

Here we have a very sweet and pathetic, if perhaps somewhat conventional, expression of the struggle between filial duty and amorous passion. It was not, however, in delineation of the tender passion that Corneille excelled. His strength lay in expressing in strong, sonorous language the sentiments of honour, patriotism and virtue. For what the French term *belles tirades* he stands unrivalled. Who can read without being moved, or rather who can hear declaimed, as only French actors know how to declaim, that magnificent soliloquy of Don Diègue, delivered immediately after he has been insulted by Don Gomès—

‘O rage ! O désespoir ! O vieillesse ennemie !

N’ai-je donc tant vécu que pour cette infamie,

Et ne suis-je blanchi dans les travaux guerriers

Que pour voir en un jour flétrir tant de lauriers,’ etc.

—Act 1. Scene 8.

This is what the French mean when they talk of the *grand style*. They do not mean the deepest emotions of the heart

poured forth in imaginative verse. They mean the noblest moral sentiments expressed in exalted and impressive lines. Addison's 'Cato' comes nearer to what the French mean by *grand style* or *style soutenu* than any play of Shakespeare's. But of literary criticism anon. Let us in the meantime examine another play.

Next in order of production comes 'Horace.' The plot of this play is founded on that famous fight between the Horatii and the Curiatii, of which Livy gives such a thrilling account. Here Corneille was on fresh ground. No writer had ever attempted to dramatise this splendid tale. And it was a theme peculiarly adapted to his genius. The ardent patriotism of the man who slays his sister for lamenting an enemy of Rome had, in its very ferocity, something not altogether alien to Corneille's own disposition. With all his generosity of feeling, there was a certain harshness about him which greatly increased as he grew older, and caused him to select the most repellent subjects for his plots. In the play which we are now considering there is an unnecessary feature which gives additional cruelty to the action of Horatius. Corneille, without any warrant of history, makes his hero the husband of an Alban woman. We should therefore look for a little more forbearance from him; but, as if foreseeing this objection, Corneille has put into the mouth of Camilla, the sister of Horatius, one of the bitterest invectives ever penned:—

'Rome, l'unique objet de mon ressentiment !  
Rome; à qui vient ton bras d'immoler mon amant !  
Rome, qui t'a vu naître, et que ton cœur adore !  
Rome enfin, que je hais parce qu'elle t'honore !'

—Act IV. Scene 5.

and thus renders intelligible the sudden outburst of fury which causes the brother to slay her. The character of the old Horatius is conceived in Corneille's ruling spirit. We are presented with a type of the antique Roman as tradition and fable had depicted him—stern, implacable, an ardent lover of his country, and ready to sacrifice all for her welfare. When the choice of Rome falls on his three sons he restrains all natural tears, and exhorts his daughter-in-law Sabina to do likewise. News having been brought him that two of his sons are slain and that the third is fleeing before the Curiatii, his wrath and indignation know no bounds, and he threatens to slay him with his own hands should he escape. His fierce retort, 'Qu'il mourût,' when Julia asks him what his son was to have done alone against three foes, is one of the most often quoted of Corneille's utterances. With all its lofty patriotism and heroic spirit there is a harshness about this play which makes it repellent to us in some ways. We miss the *lacrime rerum*, the pathos of life and death which we find in Sophocles or Shakespeare. We cannot imagine, either in real life or in the highest dramatic art, a character of so fierce a strain as that of Horatius. In one passage he actually glories in the fact that he and his brothers have to encounter three brothers who are so nearly and dearly related to him as are the Curiatii—one being his sister's lover, and another his own wife's brother. He thinks this close relationship will lend all the higher lustre to his self-sacrifice. Now, such a savage exultation transcends the bounds of human nature and tragedy alike. Aristotle, in his terse and vigorous way, would have termed it *μιαρός*. We all know the upshot of the tale—how Horatius

was first condemned by the decemvirs and then acquitted by the people. Corneille varies Livy's account of the trial, and makes the king Tullus Hostilius sole arbiter. This was probably a concession to the monarchical spirit of the age.

Next in order of production comes 'Cinna.' This much-praised play turns upon the plot formed by Cinna against the life of Augustus, and the clemency of the latter in pardoning the conspirator. Emilie, whose father, Turanius, had been the Emperor's guardian, and had been put to death during the proscriptions, had vowed to be avenged on her father's murderer, and had persuaded Cinna to attempt the assassination, her love being the prize. Through the treason of one of his fellow-conspirators Cinna's plot is made known to Augustus, and instead of punishing the would-be assassin, the Emperor forgives him. The character of Cinna as depicted by Corneille is not calculated to excite admiration or sympathy. He is simply a miserable self-seeking intriguer, ready to sacrifice the life of his friend and benefactor to gratify the blood-thirsty hatred of his mistress. He has no real patriotism at heart, for in one scene he actually urges Augustus, who is consulting him as to whether it would not be better for Rome that he should resign his throne, not to do so, but to retain his sovereignty as a thing necessary to his people's safety and happiness. Indeed, we are almost led to infer from hints casually dropped that Cinna coveted the throne for himself. Altogether, we cannot but feel a cordial dislike for him. His very wavering and hesitation to commit the crime strike one as being the effect rather of cowardice than of natural compunction, and we are sorry that the Emperor's



clemency should fall on so unworthy an object. No less unpleasing, but more admirable on the whole, is the character of Emilie. She, at least, has a tangible grievance; and when we are tempted to think harshly of this *adorable furie*, as she has been called, we should bear in mind Cinna's words, 'Que la vengeance est douce à l'esprit d'une femme!' Augustus is represented as already failing in strength of will and worn out by the long toils of empire, the miseries of his family life, and the intrigues of his enemies. He is no longer the proud victor of Actium. Weary of bloodshed and perceiving the futility of crushing one of the hydra-heads of conspiracy, he allows himself to be persuaded by his wife, Livie, to spare the guilty Cinna. This he does, and in a speech full of magnanimous and touching expression he assures Cinna of his forgiveness and favour. The closing words of this speech, 'Soyons amis, Cinna, c'est moi qui t'en convie,' are among the most famous of Corneillian quotations.

The last of Corneille's tragedies to be examined here in detail is that of 'Polyeucte.' This play possesses a singular interest for the student, as it is the first, since the days of the *Mystères*, into which a Christian martyr is introduced. Corneille was, doubtless, led to this line of thought by the religious spirit of his time, as displayed by the Jansenist movement. This is not the place to enter into a disquisition on that remarkable back-swirl of thought which followed the Renaissance in France, but it will be interesting to see how and to what extent Corneille came under its influence. To any one who has studied the best religious life of that time, as exemplified by the Port-Royalists, the spiritual kinship of

Corneille with those grave and austere 'Solitaries,' such as Saint-Cyran, Singlin and Arnaud, is apparent. He was a Catholic and a Christian in the severer sense of the terms. The spirit of the Renaissance seems to have touched him only by its preference for antiquity in matters of dramatic art. And of the Reformation he only felt the purifying influence in life and conduct through the Jansenist movement, which was intellectually in antagonism with that Reformation.

The subject of this play, as has been already said, is taken from the martyrology. Polyeuctes was a young man of noble family, who lived in Armenia in the days of the Emperor Decius. He had married Paulina, the daughter of the governor Felix, and had distinguished himself in war. His bosom friend, Nearchus, had become a Christian, and endeavoured to win Polyeuctes over to his faith, which he at last succeeded in accomplishing. On the occasion of a great public festival, Polyeuctes and Nearchus go to the Temple of Jupiter and fling down the statues in presence of all the people. For this they are both condemned to death by Felix. Nearchus is executed at once, but Polyeuctes is given a chance of recantation, which he rejects. Not even the prayers and entreaties of his wife avail to move him, and he is led away, rejoicing to be found worthy to die for the name of Christ. Paulina beholds his death, and is so much touched by his heroic constancy that she suddenly feels herself constrained to become a Christian too, and her sudden conversion brings about that of her father also.

Of all Corneille's plays, this is the one which most appeals to the heart. The character of Pauline is a very interesting

one. Before she married Polyeucte (which she only did at her father's behest) she had been in love with a Roman knight called Sévère. At the time of Polyeucte's martyrdom, her former lover had come to Armenia after a victorious campaign which he had been waging against the Scythians. He is still ignorant of her marriage and hopes to make her his bride. His grief on learning that she is already a wife is for a moment lightened by the thought that her husband will have to pay the penalty of his impiety. But his better nature and Pauline's entreaties prevail, and being enabled, in virtue of his personal credit with the Emperor, to obtain a pardon for Polyeucte, he resolves to exercise the power. But Félix, the governor, had been beforehand with him, and his clemency came too late to save his rival. Pauline, though still having in her heart traces of her old passion for Sévère, had learned to love her husband and to admire his lofty nature, and so, while the sudden appearance of the former caused her no slight emotion, it yet caused her no uneasiness so far as she herself was concerned. Her only dread was for her husband.

When Corneille read this play for the first time at the Hôtel de Rambouillet in presence of that illustrious literary circle, the subject of his play was condemned. The Christian element gave great offence, martyrs not being in vogue at the time, and the episode of the overthrowing of the idols scandalised a reverend bishop who happened to be present. But the public hailed the piece with enthusiasm.

It now remains to attempt to sum up Corneille's claims to our interest and admiration. He no longer bulks so largely

in the eyes of the world as he once did. His day of ascendancy is long since over. Even Frenchmen find it difficult nowadays to feel for him half the admiration their fathers felt. The indiscriminate laudation of the critics at the beginning of this century raised against them the voice of William Augustus Schlegel, and from his onslaught upon French dramatic art the defenders of the old *régime* never fully recovered. He showed with admirable penetration and force the insufficiency of the French conception of tragic art, and demolished conventionalities with, for a German, really sparkling wit. It is for us nowadays rather to consider what real merit lay at the bottom of the system which he so bitterly attacked, and to attain to a more impartial judgment. In the first place, we must remember that of modern European nations the French is that which has most loved dramatic art and possesses the greatest aptitude for it. Both as actors and as playwrights they reign supreme. Is it to be believed, then, that their grandfathers were so dull as fondly to admire what was utterly unworthy of admiration? This surely is hardly credible, and the more we examine certain aspects of the French drama, the more are we struck by its admirable adaptability to stage-representation. Viewed under this light, it will stand comparison with any in the world, except perhaps that of Sophocles. As a mere playwright, it is perhaps doubtful if Shakespeare really holds the exalted rank which is usually assigned to him in this country. That very imagination which constitutes his supreme poetic gift, renders him at times too lavish of his wealth. Again, his plots are often confused by the host of subsidiary characters introduced. The charge of

barbarism brought against him by Voltaire is not altogether without foundation. If we could imagine Sophocles and Corneille spiritually present at a performance of 'Hamlet,' and able to understand the drift of the play, would the verdict of those two great writers be altogether such as we should relish? Both would be inexpressibly shocked by the desperate slaughters which are enacted *coram populo*, and both would complain of the inordinate length of the piece. On these two points, at least, both Greek and Frenchman would agree, however much they might differ on others. We in this country are too prone to think that dramatic action consists in things actually performed before our eyes. We have an intolerance of what appeals only to the feelings and the imagination. We want something that strikes the eye. Hence the elaborate scenery which a well-known English actor-manager introduces on his stage, sometimes almost to the overwhelming of the play itself. It is a grave question whether all this care for externals does not diminish heedfulness of the one thing needful, that is, acting.

Whatever, therefore, may be the limitations of Corneille's art, we must always bear in mind that he wrote plays which scored a world-wide fame in his lifetime, and are still constantly performed before the most critical audience in the world.

If, however, we regard him in the light of a poet and interpreter of the human heart, his inferiority to Shakespeare is manifest. For human nature as a whole he seems to have had little or no sympathy. Only when it culminated in heroic lives could he admire and understand it. His genius was

at home in describing the stern virtues of Roman patriots, or the chivalry of Spanish nobles. Then he waxed eloquent, and his diction 'burned with noble fire.' Only a century like the last could dare to place Corneille on the lofty level where Sophocles and Shakespeare are. Man's end and destiny, the problems of the soul, his hopes and fears of a hereafter, his infinite yearnings and divine despair, were not within the compass of his genius. Neither shall one find in him the *δράσαντι παθεῖν* of old Greek tragedy, the dread of avenging deities and the awful, inevitable imminence of fate. He who has once breathed the keen dark air of Æschylus or the clear and delicate ether of Sophocles, will feel oppressed in the courtly atmosphere of Corneille. Nature, with all the stars and sea-winds in her raiment, never breaks in upon us here. We are never laid in the cool flowery lap of earth and suffered there to be refreshed for a season. No one ever babbles of green fields or holds converse with the running brooks. We live among the great ones of the world, in palaces, and never escape thence into the light of common day.

No finer single pieces of rhetoric could be found than those I have already quoted. The lines seem to leap all armed from the furnace of the poet's thought, and clash sonorously in our ears. But when it falls to his lot to describe the gentler passions, the loves of men and women, then he appears stiff and awkward and harsh. His heroines may be 'adorable furies' sometimes, but adorable women they never are. They are too self-conscious, their love is too much of the head and too little of the heart. They all protest too much. One feels that had they been born in a later age and in altered circumstances,

they would have been of the number of those wild ladies whose battle-cry is 'woman's rights.' We feel that this might have been so, and think regretfully of Juliet, of Rosalind, and Imogen. Yet, let us not underrate Corneille. His work in part will remain an imperishable monument of literary glory. Much of it, no doubt, has been stricken by the dusk of oblivion, but there will ever shine a radiance as of sunset around the 'Cid' and 'Polyeucte' and 'Horace.' He is one of the earlier gods, dethroned but not deceased, a Saturn with 'realmless' but still regal eyes, and he will abide for ever in the Pantheon of dead authors, a stately presence lit with a mellow twilight of renown.

## RACINE

*Difficile est proprie communia dicere*—It is hard to be original on a hackneyed theme. How much easier it is to write an essay on some fresh production in the world of letters than on some hackneyed theme which has been turned this way and that, and has already been looked at from almost every possible point of view! And if this is true of any famous pre-nineteenth century name, it is in a special sense true of the subject of this essay. What new thing can one find to say about Racine? His name has been a shuttlecock of wordy warfare for centuries, and even his own countrymen are getting tired of keeping up the game. Since Victor Hugo began his magnificent reaction against the classicists, and Sainte-Beuve constituted himself the champion of the new faith in the field of literary criticism, the star of Racine's ascendancy has waned. Indeed, in England one may truly say that it has long since been extinct. The number of Englishmen living at this moment who could conscientiously say that they had read more than one play of Racine's through, must, I think, be small. In fact, it is questionable if a taste for Racine ever genuinely existed in the land of Shakespeare. That moderation of tone and colouring which is so eminently a quality of Racine's genius is neither appreciated nor understood on this side of



the Channel. But there was a time when he had many professed admirers in this country—imitators, even. The drama of the Restoration was largely borrowed from French models; and, even in the days of Addison, the *beaux esprits* would have considered that they laid themselves open to the charge of barbarism had they failed to praise Racine. This tone prevailed till the reaction from the ideas of the French Revolution brought about a reaction in literary judgment also. From this reaction we are only now slowly recovering, and for this very reason are perhaps in a better position for determining the place that should be awarded to Racine than were the critics of the eighteenth century.

Among those who, by their writings, have helped to bring about this modification of ideas—if we can indeed say that it has been brought about—Matthew Arnold was perhaps the most considerable, at least in the literary sphere. Thanks to his penetrating insight and charming style, we have learned, or rather relearned, to admire what we had hitherto reviled or despised. But even Matthew Arnold confesses himself unable to appreciate the merit of Racine and of French dramatic literature generally. Nor is the reason of this far to seek. Arnold was brought up on the old classical lines, and thus learned early to love those masters of the ancient theatre—Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides. If, too, as we must suppose, Arnold read Shakespeare when a boy, the difficulty of appreciating Racine must have been doubled to him. Corneille might have found more favour in his eyes, for in him the atmosphere, though that of a court, is still that of a court heroic in its simplicity, whereas that of Racine breathes of the

*galant* court of Louis XIV. In place of the stern virtues of Roman patriots and the fiery chivalry of Spanish nobles, we have the tearful sensibility of a Bérénice, and the chastened, if unchaste, passion of a Phèdre. In dealing with Racine, we must always bear in mind that we are dealing with a 'Décadent.' The contemporaries of the elder poet so considered him, and Corneille himself called him a 'Doucereux.' Now, between 'As You Like It' and 'Bérénice' there is a great gulf, and it is not to be wondered at if even so nimble-minded a critic as Arnold failed to cross it.

Added to these there is another reason, which probably prevented Arnold, as it has prevented many another Englishman, from appreciating French poetry; and that is the fact of French possessing practically only one language, whereas English possesses two. We all know that in the best English poetry there is a preponderance of Saxon words over Latin, which is due to the fact that the former are, as a rule, much more simple and sensuous than the latter, and as such are fitter for poetic use. The words of Latin origin are more abstract, and are apt to seem stilted; but the French poet has no choice. The words he employs are, for the most part, necessarily Latin. To French ears, however, these words do not sound pedantic. They are the natural symbols of thought and feeling. But when *we* read them, we cannot help remembering that we have in English much simpler synonyms, and are affected with a sensation of irritation at what we conceive to be the aridity and pomposity of the diction. This is a continual stumbling-block to English readers. We are unable to feel those Latin words for which we have simpler equivalents in the way that

a Frenchman feels them. So, for us, the finest passages in French poetry are spoilt by the mere fact of the superior richness of the English tongue. Rightly to understand a telling speech out of Racine, one should translate it into English, carefully eliminating all the distinctively Latin words, and substituting, as far as possible, Saxon words. A few lines from 'Athalie' will illustrate what I mean. Take, for example, the following fine distich :—

‘Mais un trouble importun vient depuis quelques jours  
De mes prospérités interrompre le cours.’

Now an Englishman, on reading this, involuntarily translates it to himself thus :—‘But an importunate trouble has for these last few days been interrupting the course of my prosperities,’ which is neither more nor less than bombast. But suppose one translates :—‘But a haunting dread has for these last few days dashed all my happiness,’ one has an inkling of the drift of the passage. It is, no doubt, very hard to forget the connotation of those Latinised words in English. They are too like ours in sound, not to suggest at once their English derivatives. This would not be the case, however, if we heard the same words in their Latin form. Roughly translated into metre, those lines might run as follows :—

‘Rumpere me curarum avet importuna mearum  
Turba diu ; prosper desiit ire dies.’

Here we have the same words as in French, but our ears are not offended by them. They do not immediately suggest their English equivalents. Enough, however, of this side-issue.

There are two French writers, whom to appreciate, one must, I think, have French blood in one's veins, and they are, on the

one hand, Racine, and, on the other, Alfred de Musset. (La Fontaine might also, I think, be added to the number.) One seldom meets a Briton who cordially likes either; and yet, as Racine was the poet of predilection of seventeenth-century France, so Musset is really the most intimately loved poet of France to-day. And, just as their grandfathers openly admitted the superiority of Corneille and secretly gave Racine the palm, so Frenchmen of to-day, while professing a greater admiration for Victor Hugo, often in their heart of hearts cherish a warmer feeling for Musset. Both Racine and Musset are essentially French, and owe their popularity to qualities which are almost antipathetic to Englishmen. Sensibility is the dominant quality in both poets. In both, too, do we find that purity of idiom which we miss in writers like Corneille and Victor Hugo. The French is native and uncorrupted. There is no intermixture of foreign terms and expressions. The ideas are French ideas. Thought, feeling and style are, as they would say, *tout ce qu'il y a de plus français*.

Now, generally speaking, one may be nearly certain that a play, poem, or picture which possesses to the fullest degree the characteristic quality of a people will not be that one which will appeal to the foreigner at first. It is only after long study, and when his mind has gained in flexibility and sympathy, that he will come to feel the charm which is felt by the artist's countrymen. This is eminently true of a literary artist like Racine, whose whole tone is so completely and consistently French. The very fact that in his choice of subjects he has avoided all native tragic themes, makes the Frenchness of his method of treatment only the more apparent.

It would lead us too far from our present subject to inquire into the reason which induced the French to select the subjects of their tragedy rather from the ancient histories of Greece and Rome than from their own national history—fertile enough, one would have thought, in horrors and commanding figures. Probably the spirit of imitation, more than anything else, brought this about; but perhaps also a feeling of the dignity of the ancient models, combined with an ignorance of their own annals. At any rate, Racine found the traditions of the French stage too strong for him, and never attempted, except in the cases of ‘*Esther*,’ ‘*Bajazet*’ and ‘*Athalie*,’ to depart from the classical models. And in the case of ‘*Esther*’ and of ‘*Athalie*’ he could have quoted the great Corneille as an authority for the employment of sacred history in his plays. These two last-mentioned plays recall an interesting fact in the life of the poet. Brought up, as he had been, in the austere discipline of Port-Royal, and throughout his life a sincere believer, he had, for many years, and those the brightest of his fame, lived an entirely mundane and somewhat dissipated life. His old friends and guides, the ‘*Solitaires*’ of Port-Royal, had long since given him up as a hopeless pervert to the spirit of the world. The favourite poet of a gay and youthful court, he had become the spoilt child of Fortune, and had basked in the warm rays of the ‘sun’ of Louis XIV. But, at length, his unclouded prosperity and success had given rise to envy and jealousy, and a shameless cabal was formed against him. On the occasion of the production of ‘*Phèdre*,’ which is perhaps his masterpiece, an unworthy rival, Pradon, all but won the palm for a production utterly inferior to Racine’s in the eyes of all

competent judges. This blow apparently opened his eyes to the vanity of earthly things. At any rate, he at once relinquished the stage, and devoted himself to the care of his household and the upbringing of his children. This life of unvarying domesticity lasted ten years, during which no profane work came from his pen. Then, yielding to the entreaties of Madame de Maintenon, he consented to write a religious play for her young noblewomen of St.-Cyr. 'Esther' was the result of his renewed efforts in the play-making line. Shortly afterwards was produced 'Athalie,' his last, and, as many consider, his finest play. After 'Athalie' we hear no more of Racine, except as a historiographer and favourite reader of the king. He apparently possessed a sweet and pleasant voice, which made him a frequent and distinguished attendant at the king's bedside. And so he continued till the fatal misunderstanding with his royal master, which, they say, hastened his end. What caused the quarrel is not definitely known, but it is supposed that Racine had dared to intercede for his old friends, the 'Solitaires' of Port-Royal, who were now being persecuted at the instigation of their enemies, the Jesuits. If this be so (a conclusion hardly warranted by the tone of his two letters to Nicole), it does honour to the loyalty of the man who ventured to champion the cause of his early teachers in opposition to the set purpose of a king whose frown meant no less than social extinction.

It is hard for us to realise how completely the ascendancy of Louis XIV. imposed itself on the mind of all who approached him. Veneration and admiration seem but feeble words to apply to the feeling which animated his courtiers. Adoration

as of an almost divine being is more what expresses it, and this feeling was quite sincere. Louis XIV., in spite of all his shortcomings, must have been cast in a larger mould than the majority of men, and possessed commanding qualities of mind and character. It was not merely a matter of periwig and shoe-buckles, as Thackeray would have us think. One quality he certainly possessed, and that was the faculty of discrimination. He had a good eye for a man, and knew how to use him to the best advantage. Though having nothing of the poet in himself ('Votre Majesté a voulu faire de méchants vers, et elle a réussi'), he was, nevertheless, quite aware what lustre poetry can cast on a king's reign. Racine was his especial favourite. The two men had this in common—that they both were devout Catholics, both atoned for a youth of gaiety and gallantry by an old age of strictness and austerity, and both had an innate preference for the dignified in sentiment. Racine, too, unlike his more original and less pliant contemporary, Corneille, had a facile, sensitive nature that could be moulded to serve the king's ends, and easily took the impress of the court, an impress noticeable in all he wrote.

The first play which he produced was 'Les Frères Ennemis,' a feeble and ill-written drama, whose gross faults of arrangement and language are occasionally relieved by felicities of expression. It has no merit sufficient to detain us in a survey of his works. Much the same may be said of his second play, 'Alexandre,' which does, however, show progress in style. Some of the speeches, more especially those of Porus, are ably written; but the general drift of the piece is very weak. Racine had not yet found his line. He was still under the

influence of Corneille, whose Auguste in the play of 'Cinna' is evidently the model taken by Racine for his 'Alexandre.' His two female characters, Cléofile and Axiane, are more in the style of the Corneillian heroines, whose love is of the head, not of the heart.

The next in order of production, 'Andromaque,' marks an era in the annals of the French stage. It bears the same relation to the other plays of Racine that the 'Cid' bears to those of Corneille. In both, the distinctive pre-eminence of their authors comes out. As Rodrigue may be taken as a type of chivalry, so Andromaque may be taken as a type of wifely and motherly affection. And as the elder poet strove to excite, and succeeded in exciting, admiration, so Racine stirred pity. In this respect he approaches nearer to the Greek conception of tragedy as defined by Aristotle, who says that the aim of tragedy is to excite pity and fear. Now fear, at least in the sense of φόβος, which implies a fear of avenging deities and a dread of retribution for violation of moral law, is quite alien to the French dramatists. Both Corneille and Racine allow perfect spontaneity to their characters, unfettered by the sins of their ancestors. This vital distinction cannot be too strongly insisted on, and we shall see presently, in the case of Phèdre, what a difference it makes in our conception of the character.

The basis of 'Andromaque' is to be found in two plays of Euripides, and a passage of Virgil. Racine, unlike the vast majority of his contemporaries, was an excellent Greek and Latin scholar, and was quite familiar with the originals, so a remark he makes in his preface to 'Andromaque,' is rendered



inexcusable. He says, 'My personages are so famous in antiquity that however slightly one is acquainted with it, one can easily see that I have rendered them as the ancient poets have given them to us—tels que les anciens poètes nous les ont donnés.' Now let us see how the ancient poets *have* given us those personages.

The plot of Euripides' 'Andromache' is briefly as follows :—Andromache, widow of Hector and captive of Neoptolemus, the son of Achilles, has taken refuge in the Temple of Thetis to escape from the persecution of Hermione, whom Neoptolemus (or Pyrrhus, as he is also called) has wedded. She had been obliged to submit to the passion of her master, according to the barbarous usage of the times, and had given birth to a son called Molossus. During the absence of her lord, the jealous Hermione, in concert with her father, Menelaus, has determined to destroy both mother and child. A Phrygian slave-girl comes to tell Andromache that Molossus has been discovered and that Menelaus has obtained possession of him. She promises to go to Pharsalus to warn Peleus of the danger threatening his great-grandson. Hermione then comes in and threatens Andromache that if she refuses to leave the sanctuary, her son will be put to death. Next Menelaus appears with the young Molossus. He declares that he will slay him if she does not yield. This Andromache at last does, and both she and her son are dragged off to the palace. When they appear again, they are being led to death. Suddenly, however, Peleus arrives, and bids the execution cease. Menelaus confronts him, and there is a scene of violent altercation. Finally, Menelaus is obliged to yield, and departs to Lacedæmon.

Peleus then releases Andromache and her son. Thus ends the first and most interesting part of the play. The second part, which forms in reality another drama, begins with the appearance of Hermione's nurse, who announces that her mistress, terrified at the idea of punishment that probably awaits her at her husband's hands on account of her wicked attempt, wishes to commit suicide. Orestes then comes in, on his way to Dodona, and desirous to have news of his cousin Hermione. The latter flings herself at his feet and entreats him to deliver her from her husband's vengeance. Orestes tells her that he had heard of her husband's bad behaviour, and has come with the purpose of rescuing her and making her his wife, in accordance with an original promise made him by her father Menelaus. He also announces that he has devised a secret plot in Delphi for the destruction of Neoptolemus. Hermione gives silent consent to her husband's death and follows her preserver. Peleus, warned of the danger threatening his grandson, reappears on the scene. Soon a messenger comes and relates the story of the slaying of Pyrrhus. Then the body of Pyrrhus is brought upon the stage, and whilst the old man is lamenting over it, the goddess Thetis appears and comforts him. It is arranged that Andromache shall wed Helenus, a Trojan who, like herself, had been a slave of Pyrrhus, and her son Molossus shall rule over the Molossians. Peleus shall receive immortality at the hands of the goddess who honoured him with her love, and shall dwell for ever in the islands of the blessed beside his son Achilles.

The identity of the names excepted, and also the general features of the characters of Orestes and Andromache, nothing

more dissimilar to the play of Racine could well be imagined. To begin with, he had to avoid representing his heroine as she appears in the old play. No French audience of that day would have tolerated an Andromache who had borne a child in slavery. They would have considered such a condition of affairs as revolting. Moreover, as Racine says, everybody knew of Andromache as the mother of Astyanax—no one had ever heard of Molossus. In his second preface to the play he rightly remarks, 'J'ai cru en cela me conformer à l'idée que nous avons maintenant de cette princesse.' This is quite a fair statement of the case, and it should therefore be borne in mind that when we are dealing with 'Andromaque,' and indeed with Racine's plays generally, we are dealing with representations of character, not as they historically were, or as they appeared to the Greek dramatists, but as they appeared through a French medium. This view of the subject sufficiently refutes Schlegel's criticism on that score. After all, art is nature seen through a temperament, and every dramatic writer has surely licence to adopt the way of thinking of his countrymen. Indeed, he can scarcely, except by an archæological effort incompatible with free artistic activity, fling himself into the life of a bygone age and reproduce it as it really was. This is rather the office of the historian or of the epic poet than of the dramatist.

Let us see, then, what Racine has made of this famous old-world tragedy. Following the indication of Virgil, he has laid the scene in Epirus, and not in Thessaly. In the first act, we have the meeting of Pylade and Oreste at the court of Pyrrhus. Oreste tells his friend that the real object of his visit is to

seek the hand of Hermione, his cousin, who had been despatched by her father Menelaus to Pyrrhus, as Pyrrhus' bride-elect. Here we have at once the most un-Greek situation conceivable. What would a Greek have thought of the presence of an unwedded maid, accompanied only by a *confidente*, in the court of a king to whom she had been betrothed? One can at once perceive how impossible such a state of matters would have appeared to him. Oreste gives as the ostensible reason of his presence, that he has been sent as an ambassador to the Grecian States to demand the surrender of Astyanax, the son of Hector and Andromaque. The Greeks are angry that the offspring of their great enemy should be suffered to live, and they desire his death. Pylade tells his friend that Pyrrhus, far from wishing to wed Hermione, is desperately in love with Andromaque, and he advises him to excite opposition in the mind of Pyrrhus by urging him to deliver up Astyanax, and so increase his ardour for Andromaque. 'Pressez, demandez tout, pour ne rien obtenir,' he says, and Oreste takes his advice. He makes use of arguments with Pyrrhus which are only calculated to make him more stubborn and unyielding, and less inclined than ever to deliver up Astyanax and marry Hermione. Andromaque then enters on her way to pay her daily visit to her son. Pylade informs her of the demand of the Greeks, and warns her that unless she consents to his flame, her son shall be delivered up. She goes out after hinting that she will die along with her boy. In the second act, Hermione and her *confidente* Cléone talk over the arrival of Oreste. Cléone urges her mistress to flee with Oreste. Hermione, out of rage at the infidelity of Pyrrhus, gives a half

consent, and in the next scene we have a very pretty piece of coquetry and love-making between Oreste and Hermione, at the end of which she promises to follow her cousin if Pyrrhus refuses to give up Astyanax. In the next scene Pyrrhus, following the advice of his old friend and guide, Phœnix, announces a change in his plans. He will deliver up Astyanax, and wed Hermione. At this news, naturally, Oreste is plunged into despair. In the third act he expresses his determination to carry off Hermione in spite of Pyrrhus. She, apprised of the change in Pyrrhus' resolution, is overjoyed at the prospect of his returning to her feet. Andromaque is distraught with grief at the prospect of losing her son, and beseeches Hermione to try and move Pyrrhus to pity, but only meets with a cutting refusal. She next flings herself at the knees of Pyrrhus himself, and, by a touching appeal, again causes him to change his purpose. He promises to save her son and to drive away Hermione, if Andromaque will consent to become his wife. In the fourth act she determines to yield to his suit, and, after having made him swear to protect her son, to stab herself the moment the marriage rites are over. Hermione next appears. She has sent her *confidente* for Oreste, and he soon arrives. She is furious, naturally, at the new turn in Pyrrhus' resolve, and urges Oreste to slay Pyrrhus at the altar, offering herself as the price of the murder. Oreste reluctantly promises to accomplish her vengeance. In the beginning of the fifth act we have a description given by Cléone to Hermione of the marriage festival. Then Oreste comes in and tells her Pyrrhus has met his death at the hands of the enraged Greeks. He himself had not been able to put in a blow. Suddenly Her-

mione turns on him, furiously upbraids him for taking her at her word, and rushes off. Pylade soon after comes in and tells Oreste that Hermione has flung and stabbed herself on the dead body of Pyrrhus, that Andromaque is being acclaimed by the soldiers of Epirus and is giving orders to take vengeance on the Greeks. He therefore urges his friend to flee at once. Then comes the final scene of all. Oreste, maddened by the crime he has committed and the loss of Hermione, is assailed by the Furies, whom he fancies he beholds with snakes entwined in their hair. He is hurriedly carried off by Pylade and his attendants.

Comparing the two plots, one cannot fail to be struck by the simplicity of the Greek and the complexity of the French. On the one hand, we have the motherly love of Andromache as the sole motive of the play, and a motherly love dissociated from any exalted feeling for the father of her son. Like the women of the heroic age, Andromache accepts the changes and chances of life as they occur. Hector is dead, so is 'Astyanax. She has been allotted as a captive to Pyrrhus and bears him a son. This son she loves better than her life. But on the news of Pyrrhus' death, she is quite ready to become the wife of Helenus, her fellow-slave and fellow-Trojan, and the brother of Hector. How completely different this is from the French Andromaque! The latter is, as it were, Christianised. She refuses the advances of Pyrrhus, and there is no word of Helenus. That is, she regards the marriage-tie with Hector as sacred and indissoluble, so that in her we have not only the loving mother, but also the widow faithful to her dead husband's memory. Hermione, in like manner, is not

the jealous wife. She is the passionate lover who takes vengeance on the object of her unrequited love, and then, rejecting the man who aided in perpetrating the crime for her sake, commits suicide. In fact, love, in the modern sense of the word, forms the most important part of the French tragedy—love, as it has been deepened and intensified and spiritualised by Christianity and chivalry. Orestes in the Greek play is not really in love with Hermione. He is angry that she should have been taken from him after she had been promised to him by her father—that is all.

Taking everything into consideration, we may say that Euripides excels in pathos, and Racine in interest. Interest—that is what the French imperatively require in a drama. Cæsar's criticism of the Gauls as *novarum rerum semper cupidi* applies not only in the political, but also in the literary sphere. They want rapidity of action and sustained dramatic interest. This the 'Andromaque' of Racine possesses to an eminent degree. From beginning to end we are breathlessly eager to know what will happen to Astyanax, and how the crossing love-affairs will turn out. Observe how they are interwoven. Oreste loves Hermione; Hermione loves Pyrrhus; Pyrrhus loves Andromaque; and Andromaque loves her son Astyanax. All this is immensely exciting, and our sympathies are keenly aroused for all the personages. We are glad that Andromaque is left mistress of the situation, but we also feel extremely sorry for the unhappy lovers. In the Greek play, Orestes and Hermione are somewhat contemptible characters; and as for Pyrrhus, the fact of his not appearing on the stage prevents our having any very strong feeling for his fate.

What one does miss on the French stage are those beautiful choral songs that, as it were, divide the acts of the Greek play, and are so rich in poetry; and also the actual appearance of Andromaque's son. Euripides was too great a master of the pathetic to miss so powerful a means of exciting our sympathy, and he has accordingly given the most touching and beautiful dialogue to the mother and child as they are being led away to death.

Let us now examine the play a little more in detail. The first scene between Oreste and Pylade puts us at once in possession of the state of affairs at the court of Pyrrhus. We are even led to perceive the last terrible outburst of Oreste's madness—the divine punishment for his mother's murder—

'Surtout je redoutais cette mélancolie  
Où j'ai vu si longtemps votre âme ensevelie.'

The entry of Andromaque is very touching and effective:

'Je passais jusqu'aux lieux où l'on garde mon fils.  
Puisqu'une fois le jour vous souffrez que je voie  
Le seul bien qui me reste et d'Hector et de Troie,  
J'allais, Seigneur, pleurer un moment avec lui—  
Je ne l'ai point encore embrassé d'aujourd'hui.'

There is a limpidity and sweetness in these lines (at least to French ears) which are quite admirable. The last words of this scene and act are well chosen to rivet the interest of the spectator. Pyrrhus has vainly endeavoured to make Andromaque listen to his suit. She has turned a deaf ear. He then holds out the threat of giving up Astyanax should she continue obstinate—

'Madame, en l'embrassant songez à le sauver.'



We are thrilled with anticipant fear, and we wonder what Andromaque will do.

In the second act, we have Hermione and her *confidente* Cléone talking about the arrival of Oreste. Hermione is fretting with impatience at the conduct of Pyrrhus, and the *spretæ injuria formæ* is stirring up her angriest feelings. At the same time, she betrays her unconquerable love for her faithless wooer in a speech in which she vacillates between the determination to welcome Oreste as a suitor and the hope that Pyrrhus' affection will yet veer round. Her character is throughout impetuous, headstrong and changeable. She flatters Oreste with the hope of her hand, and at the same time lets him see but too well how she loves his rival. Pyrrhus is in a hard case. On the one hand, the Greeks insist on his delivering up Astyanax, and on the other, he is passionately in love with Andromaque. Is he to sacrifice his love or his crown? He shows himself quite ready to risk the latter, but is driven to the cruel determination to surrender Astyanax by the obdurate scorn of Andromaque. His old friend Phoenix (whose speeches are even more prosaic and commonplace than the speeches of *confidants* usually are) confines himself for the most part to urging Pyrrhus to give up Astyanax and to marry Hermione. Oreste, throughout the play, is in an almost febrile state. Such a lover was never beheld on the old Greek stage. Even Hæmon, the wooer of Antigone, is cold and tame compared with him. Oreste is ready to sacrifice both life and honour for his beloved. He offers to devastate Epirus, to slay Pyrrhus, to violate all laws, human and divine, for her. To account for this reckless state of mind,

we have to remember that he is the innocent victim of the anger of the gods. His mother's murder was enjoined on him by a divine oracle, and yet he is still pursued by the Furies. Such injustice of heaven drives him to revolt against the gods. He confides his feelings to Pylade :

' Mon innocence enfin commence à me peser.  
 Je ne sais de tout temps quelle injuste puissance  
 Laisse le crime en paix et poursuit l'innocence.  
 De quelque part sur moi que je tourne les yeux  
 Je ne vois que malheurs qui condamnent les dieux.  
 Méritons leur courroux, justifions leur haine,  
 Et que le fruit du crime en précède la peine.'

This is the language of revolt, but of a revolt that wins our sympathy. How far we are from the Orestes of Euripides! *He* utters no reproach against Apollo, and his murder of Pyrrhus is regarded as merely a retributive vengeance on the man who has spared a public enemy in Andromache, and has violated private friendship by marrying a woman promised to another. It should be remarked in passing that the character of Oreste in Racine's play is based, not on the Orestes of the 'Andromache' of Euripides, but on the Orestes of the play which bears his name. In the former play, Orestes merely appears as a selfish and revengeful character. In the latter, he is the melancholy and unhappy victim of the Furies' wrath. To this Racine added the passionateness of chivalrous love, and thus transformed Orestes into a modern hero.

One word must be said concerning the *confidants* and *confidentes* of French tragedy. On all hands they are regarded as undesirable nonentities. Necessary evils is the most indulgent criticism that can be accorded them. They are the lineal suc-

cessors of two personages in the old Greek play—the *τρόφος* and the chorus. Unfortunately, the courtly grandeur of French tragedy quite precluded the representation of so humble a person as a nurse, and the chorus had long since been abolished as a useless appendage. The loss entailed by these excisions is immense. On the one hand, we lose the naturalness and homeliness of the relation between the nurse and the object of her care, which brings home to us so vividly the pathos of the situation; and on the other, we lose the charm of lyric poetry which, coming in, as it were, in the pauses of the action, reposes and refreshes the mind without absolutely cutting off our interest in the action, as the modern drop-curtain does. These *confidants* and *confidentes*, then, are generally noble personages, who give good advice or bad, as the case may be, to the main characters. Their own action in the piece is insignificant. One cannot, therefore, but see that they are a clumsy expedient. They constitute the *rôles ingrats* of the French stage.

The next play which we have to consider is 'Les Plaideurs.' This is Racine's one comedy, and a most brilliant little piece of fooling it certainly is. Molière must have trembled for his laurels when he read it. It is full of sparkling wit from beginning to end, and though confessedly based on the 'Wasps' of Aristophanes, it is even a more original production than his tragedies. Compared with its Greek rival, it easily wins the palm for wit. Aristophanes' play is rather a dull and spiritless performance, which towards the finish degenerates into mere coarse buffoonery. No doubt, there are capital jokes here and there, and Racine has incorporated

some of them in his play, notably that about the killing of the cock which the would-be judge accuses of having been bribed by a defendant not to wake him early enough to appear in court. One fine sally of the Greek comedian Racine has neglected. Old Philocleon, we are told by his son, keeps up a private beach (*αἰγιαλὸν τρέφει*) in order that he may never lack voting pebbles!

Just as the Attic poet attacked the litigiousness of the Athenians, so Racine holds up to ridicule the same vice in the people of Normandy. Monsieur Dandin, the judge, is kept under lock and key by his son, Léandre, but is always managing to escape. He *will* go and judge. 'You are ill,' says his son. 'I will be ill,' answers his father—'je veux être malade.' To all Léandre's remonstrances he lends a deaf ear, and suddenly turns the tables on his son by accusing him of foppery and extravagance. 'Each of your ribbons cost me a sentence,' he says. What a delicious satire on the venality of the courts! Then we have the great scene between Chicaneau and the Countess of Pimbèche. They have both come to plead their case before Dandin, and are refused admittance by the porter, Petit-Jean. They condole with each other, and mutually confide their respective grievances. Chicaneau has a long story about a neighbour's donkey that had strayed into his field and done a trifling damage. The Countess unfolds a series of lawsuits which she has been prosecuting against her father, her husband and her son. Chicaneau is very sympathetic, and advises her to persevere. The Countess is delighted with this counsel and asks him what steps she should take. Chicaneau begins to tell her, but

is always interrupted by the Countess, and finally both lose their temper and revile one another in the fiercest and funniest way.

Old Dandin, hearing the noise, and succeeding in eluding the vigilance of his son, pops his head out at a hole in the roof of the house, and requests Chicaneau and the Countess to plead. They both attempt to do so at one and the same time, and each offers a bribe to the judge. Suddenly the head disappears. Old Dandin has been dragged in by his son. But a few minutes later the head appears again at a grating at the basement of the house, and the litigation proceeds once more. Finally Chicaneau, in his eagerness, tumbles down beside Dandin into the cellar, leaving the Countess lamenting and complaining that Chicaneau will thus succeed in prejudicing Dandin's mind against her. But the last act is the funniest of all. A mock trial is got up by Léandre in order to please his father, and the dog of the household is arraigned for stealing a capon. A friend of Léandre, called L'Intimé, and Petit-Jean are the advocates for and against. Poor Petit-Jean has a prompter to help him on, but he only flounders about in the most amusing way. His exordium is a model of bombastic eloquence, much in vogue at the time. He takes a survey of universal history and astronomy :

‘Quand je vois les Césars, quand je vois leur fortune,  
Quand je vois le soleil, et quand je vois la lune. . . .’

Then, forgetting what he had been told to say, he splutters out in a breath that the dog had stolen a capon, and the next time he caught him at it he would murder him. Then L'Intimé rises and begins an oration in a squeaking falsetto, which makes Dandin furious. Next, he adopts a large and

parliamentary utterance, interspersing his harangue with Latin quotations. This pleases Dandin immensely, but, beginning to cite irrelevant classical authorities, he is called to order, whereupon he at once rattles out at a great rate the bald facts of the case—‘the dog was hungry and the capon was nicely dressed.’ Then in a vehement tone he pronounces a panegyric on the previous good character of the dog, and after parodying several masters of forensic eloquence *à la mode*, he concludes by bringing forward a litter of puppies, and in the most heartrending tones asks commiseration for the *famille désolée*. There is a thin thread of romance running through the play, but it is entirely subordinated to the comic business. Molière never wrote a wittier piece in a short compass, and it is to be regretted that Racine did not make another trial in the same field.

After this short excursion into the domain of comedy, Racine returned once more to the solemnities of the tragic muse. His next play was ‘*Britannicus*.’ Reserving detailed analysis of plot for plays which have been borrowed from the ancients, and which may be compared with theirs, let us try to form a general idea of the merits and defects of this historical drama.

This time we have to deal, not with the beautiful legends of ancient Hellas, but with the dreadful reality and the grim horror of the court of Nero. Tacitus is now the guide whom Racine had to follow. That stern page of the ‘*Annals*,’ in which the early crimes of the implacable beautiful tyrant are recorded in blood-red letters, and whose incisive energy and latent fire of fierce indignation make the reader’s heart beat slow with

expectant awe, had doubtless often been conned by the French dramatist. The turgid and passionate adolescence of the future scourge of the Christians, his deliberate renunciation of virtue, and his choice of evil as his good, his chafing impatience under the pedantic tutelage of Seneca and the impotent dulness of Burrhus, his growing hatred and jealousy of his mother, Agrippina, and his half-brother, Britannicus, ending in the murder of both, all combined to make Nero a magnificent subject for a great drama. Again, the character of Agrippina had the fascination which belongs to the splendid luxuriance of evil in a strong and ambitious soul. The woman who poisoned the aged Emperor, her husband, who encouraged her son in the wildest excesses of his passion, and stood not aghast at incest of the strangest sort, if so she might secure that ascendancy which was slipping from her grasp, stands alone in the lurid light of a fiendish age. An imperious and dominating spirit, she formed a fitting subject for the tragedian's art. But Racine was all too weak for such an argument. His gentle and sensitive spirit shrank from the crude atrocities of his subject, and, while striving to render to the full the overweening ambition of Agrippina and the jealous haughtiness of Nero, he left in the background, or at least mitigated as much as possible, the more revolting traits. That prince of critics, Sainte-Beuve, has brought this out well in an essay devoted to Racine. He compares the vivid and energetic phrases of Tacitus with the mollified expressions of Racine. He quotes the Roman annalist's words about Agrippina—'*cunctis malæ dominationis cupidinibus flagrans*'—and asks where in Racine we find that concentrated lust of empire.

Again, Nero appears as a romantic lover of the nobly-born Junie, and as such the rival of Britannicus. There is no word of Acte; and what are we to say of the *dénouement*,—Junie taking refuge among the Vestals, and placed under the protection of the people, as if the people could protect anybody in the days of Nero? But above all, where is that horrible feast at which the crowning crime is committed? Tacitus lets us see the whole scene. Britannicus is seated at the board, a cup is handed him, one of the attendant slaves first tastes it, but the wine is too hot; it must be cooled, and in the cold water which is poured into it Locusta's deadly drug has been infused. The victim almost immediately expires. All these details, which are given by Tacitus with such 'concision *éclatante*,' as Sainte-Beuve calls it, are omitted by Racine. We are merely told that Britannicus has been poisoned at a banquet, and our imagination is left to supply the rest.

It has often been remarked that the age of Louis XIV. was the age of the influence of women, and one cannot but feel that Racine underwent this influence, for in almost all his plays the dominating *rôle* is given to a woman. 'Britannicus' is a case in point. In spite of the fact that Nero's crime is the main argument, Agrippina's ambition really stands forth more prominently. It is she who claims our chief interest, and she who has the longest speeches. But if this be true of 'Britannicus,' how much truer it is of 'Phèdre'! Here a woman dominates the scene from beginning to end. The whole action centres in and proceeds from her. So much is this the case that an eminent French critic, Monsieur Paul Albert, has gone so far as to say that the reason of this



supremacy of one *rôle* is to be found in the overwhelming ascendancy of one figure in the French Court, namely Louis XIV. himself; and that, as all the courtiers of Versailles humbled themselves and fell on their knees before the Master, so in like manner the characters of Racine grouped themselves in a merely subordinate way round the principal personage. There may be something in this idea, but we must also bear in mind that unity of action was always aimed at by Racine, and that unity of action is intensified when concentrated in one individual.

‘*Bérénice*’ was Racine’s next venture. An air of romance hangs about this touching and charming little play. Henriette, the sister-in-law of the king, had in former years been passionately attached to him, and he to her. But, as Voltaire says, ‘*le danger de cette passion, la crainte de mettre le trouble dans la famille royale, les noms de beau-frère et de belle-sœur mirent un frein à leurs désirs; mais il resta toujours dans leurs cœurs une inclination secrète toujours chère à l’un et à l’autre.*’ Wishing to see these sentiments put into a dramatic form, she pledged both Corneille and Racine to write a piece on the parting of Titus and Berenice. Neither poet was aware that he had a rival, and their plays were produced simultaneously in 1670. Racine’s was performed at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, and Corneille’s at the Palais-Royal. As might have been expected, Racine utterly defeated the elder poet. The idyllic nature of the subject made it one quite unsuited to the genius of Corneille. His piece fell flat. Racine’s had thirty consecutive representations. And yet the argument of the play is of an extreme simplicity. In the words of the

ancient writer which Racine has put at the head of his play, 'Titus reginam Berenicen cui etiam nuptias pollicitus ferebatur statim ab urbe dimisit invitus invitam.' A lover's farewell,—that is the whole matter. But, as he very truly says further on, if the tale of the parting of Dido and Æneas is sufficient to fill a whole canto of an epic poem in which the action lasts several days, surely it is sufficient to form the stuff of a tragedy. One cannot but admire the ingenuity with which Racine has spun out the slender plot. The interest can never be said to flag, and from beginning to end we feel that *tristesse majestueuse* which Racine characteristically pronounces to be the reason of the pleasure we take in tragedy. It must be said, however, that the parting of Dido and Æneas is a much more heartbreaking and terrible event than that of Titus and Bérénice. The sword and the funeral pyre are alike absent in the latter case. Bérénice will not die. She will languish and grow pale in exile. Perhaps she will return to her land of Palestine and there meet with some disciple of the Apostles, who will point out to her the way of the Cross. Space forbids to enter into the details of the action. The *rôle ingrat* of the piece is that of Antiochus, who surely is a type of what a submissive lover ought to be,—

'. . . Je me suis tu cinq ans,  
Madame, et vais encor me taire plus longtemps.'

Poor Antiochus! Yet he was sorely stricken too, and he had known the pangs of separation from his beloved.

'Dans l'orient désert quel devint mon ennui!'

Perhaps one of the most affecting lines in the play is that

in which Bérénice entreats Titus to show her more love and less honour—

‘Voyez-moi plus souvent et ne me donnez rien.’

These words, pronounced in the silver tones of La Champmeslé, must have thrilled Racine himself to the core. As Sainte-Beuve happily remarks, “‘Bérénice’ peut être dite une charmante et mélodieuse faiblesse dans l’œuvre de Racine comme La Champmeslé le fut dans sa vie.’ In the next century we find La Harpe applying the beautiful and famous phrase, ‘des larmes dans la voix,’ to the elocution of Mlle. Gaussin in the rôle of Bérénice. But enough of this elegiac and slighter production of Racine’s art. We have ‘Phèdre’ and ‘Iphigénie’ and ‘Athalie’ before us, and must not dwell too long on minor works.

‘Bajazet’ is a bold departure from the conventional subject-ground of French tragedy. One would have thought that the Turks, of all people, were the least suitable for dramatic purposes; but Racine thought otherwise, and in his preface he attempts a justification of the play. (It may be remarked, in passing, that these little prefaces are models of elegant writing and sound sense.) He says, ‘On peut dire que le respect que l’on a pour les héros augmente à mesure qu’ils s’éloignent de nous. *Major e longinquo reverentia.* L’éloignement des pays répare en quelque sorte la trop grande proximité des temps, car le peuple ne met guère de différence entre ce qui est, si j’ose ainsi parler, à mille ans de lui, et ce qui en est à mille lieues.’ He also goes on to plead the example of Æschylus, who, in the case of the ‘Persæ,’ gave a representation of contemporary life in a foreign land.

There is a good deal to be said on both sides of the question.

It may be true enough that the heroes of tragedy should be removed from the sphere of our common-place existence, and placed in the atmosphere of an ideal world. But surely that ideal atmosphere should be one above, rather than below, the environment of the writer. Now, the manners and customs of the Turkish seraglio were certainly not on so high a plane as the manners and customs of the court of Louis XIV., whereas in the case of the 'Persæ' the discrepancy is not so glaring. The Persians were a noble, warlike people, and foemen worthy of the steel of the Greeks who fought with them at Marathon and Salamis. In a word, their ethical code was scarcely inferior to that of their enemies. Altogether, Racine's argument rather falls to the ground; but it is curious to observe that the precedent which he set in 'Bajazet' was afterwards adopted by Voltaire, who took the Chinese under his dramatic patronage, just as Racine had taken the Turks.

The plot of 'Bajazet' is not interesting. Yet Roxane, the Sultana, is a vividly conceived embodiment of fierce Oriental passion and violent hate. Her manner of making love to Bajazet has suggested the acute criticism of M. Paul Albert, that throughout Racine's plays, in which love forms the chief motive, it is almost always the woman who pays court to the man. Thus, Phèdre entreats Hippolyte, Hermione endeavours to attract Pyrrhus. Here, again, the spectacle of the female rivalries for the king's favour has its counterpart in Racine's plays.

Bajazet himself is a mean intriguer, who quite fails to win one's sympathy. Either he should have consented to wed Roxane, or else he should have given up his pretensions

to the empire. His wavering conduct meets its merited punishment, and we shed no tears over his fate. Roxane stirs our admiration rather than our pity. She, at any rate, knows what she wants, and does her best to get it. Schlegel calls her a 'disgusting' character, but this shows a somewhat narrow view. She is Oriental—that is all. This is more than Atalide can be called. She is thoroughly Frenchified and Christian: so much so, that the aged Corneille, who was present at the first representation of the piece, said it would not do—the personages were too French.

'Mithridate' belongs, like 'Bajazet,' to the secondary rank among Racine's works. The central motive of the play is not a tragic one. It very nearly approaches the borderland of comedy. Mithridate and his two sons, Xipharès and Pharnace, are in love with the same woman, Monime. During the absence of their father, who they think is dead, the two sons quarrel about the fair lady. Suddenly Mithridate appears upon the scene, much to the discomfiture of the two *amoureux*. As Schlegel says, their alarm is like that of a couple of school-boys conscious of some impropriety, on the unexpected entrance of their master. There is, however, a rugged grandeur about Mithridate himself which redeems the play. His implacable hatred of the Romans, and his scathing wrath at his sons' treachery, remind one more of the Corneillian hero. Naturally, there is the invariable Racinian note present,—he is desperately in love.

In his next play Racine deals with that thrilling legend of the Trojan war, the sacrifice of Iphigenia. Here, again, Euripides had anticipated him, but Racine has materially altered

Euripides' plot. Following an indication of Pausanias, he has introduced the personage of Eriphile, the child of Theseus and Helen. She has been brought as a captive from Lesbos by Achilles, and it is she who is sacrificed, or, rather, who sacrifices herself, in accordance with the oracle of Calchas. There is no substitution of a fawn for a maiden, as in the Greek poet. The whole tone of Racine's play is, as in the case of 'Phèdre' and 'Andromaque,' profoundly different from that of Euripides' play. Romantic passion was, as we know, not often bestowed on women by the Greeks, but was reserved for friendship betwixt man and youth.

There is something almost akin to the ludicrous in the idea of Achilles sighing as the tender lover of Iphigenia. The Briseis episode in the *Iliad* is a frankly sensual affair, and the romance of his life lies in his passionate friendship for Patroclus. A wife in the heroic age was a chattel bought like a cow or a horse. Here, as in the case of 'Andromaque,' we must bear in mind Heine's saying about Racine's plays, that they are a 'piquante mascarade.'

Voltaire regarded the 'Iphigénie' as Racine's masterpiece, but modern criticism would be more disposed to give precedence to 'Athalie' or 'Phèdre.' Passion runs higher in both these latter. They are more intensely dramatic, especially 'Phèdre.' But there are superb passages in 'Iphigénie,' and—a rare thing in French dramatic literature—lines that linger in the memory, lines that are exquisite poetry in themselves. Take, for example, the last words of the speech in which Ulysses talks of the future success of the Trojan expedition:—

'Et ce triomphe heureux qui s'en va devenir  
L'éternel entretien des siècles à venir.'

Such lines are all too rare in French dramatic poetry. The diction is apt to be arid and conventional. But Racine was a poet, and he has lines of pure poetic quality. Wherein lies the charm of such lines as I have cited, it would be difficult (though perhaps not impossible) to say; but any one who has read much poetry would be bound to feel that such lines are classical in the best, the only real, sense of the word. Euripides was a poet also, and a greater poet than Racine, and he, too, has lines of that supreme quality in his play:—

‘πρώτη σ’ ἐκάλεσα πατέρα καὶ σὺ παῖδ’ ἐμέ.’

Perhaps, however, this is too simple to compare with

‘L’éternel entretien des siècles à venir.’

There is more of conscious magnificence of style in

‘θαυμαστὰ δ’ ὡς ἀνάξι’ ἡτιμασμένη,’

or in

‘ἔχει γὰρ ὄντως ἐν θεοῖς ὁμιλίαν,’

and conscious magnificence is the characteristic of the French line.

Yet, when all is said, it is perhaps to Lucretius that we are indebted for the most beautiful description of that famous sacrifice. Those who have read what is possibly the most wonderful thing in Latin literature, the ‘De Rerum Natura,’ will remember the passage in the first book beginning:—

‘Aulide quo pacto Triviai virginis aram  
Iphianassai turpârunt sanguine fœde  
Ductores Danaûm . . .’

the pathos of the lines,

‘Casta sed incestu nubendi tempore in ipso  
Hostia concideret mactatu mœsta parentis.’

and the fierce exclamation at the end,

‘Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum !’

Those, on the other hand, who have not read the ‘De Rerum Natura’ will remember Tennyson’s lines in his ‘Dream of Fair Women’ which refer to Iphigenia. No poet has bettered the ‘black-bearded kings with wolfish eyes.’

The rôle of Ulysse is a fine one, much finer than that of Menelaus in the Greek play, but that of Clytemnestre is not nearly so grand as that of the Greek Clytemnestra. She is rather too much of the match-making mother, and some of her lines are beneath the dignity of tragedy. But the play, as a whole, is a noble and beautiful one. It is free from what is, perhaps, Euripides’ chief fault—a rhetorical straining after pathos.

‘Phèdre’ is one of the most interesting and most famous of all Racine’s plays, and as the subject of it is one which has come down to us from antiquity in various forms, let us examine it in the successive stages through which it has passed. Of Sophocles’ ‘Phædra,’ we only know a few insignificant fragments. Euripides wrote two plays on the subject, the first of which has been almost entirely lost. From the few scattered lines that remain, it would appear that in it Euripides vented his dislike of women, and painted Phædra in the darkest colours. Instead of a woman struggling against her passion and desiring to die rather than yield, we have a picture of one abandoning herself unreservedly to a criminal attachment. She even goes so far as to say

‘ἔχω δὲ τόλμης καὶ θράσους διδάσκαλον  
 Ἐν τοῖς ἀμηχάνοισιν εὐπορώτατον  
 Ἐρωτα, πάντων δυσμαχώτατον θεόν.’



She herself makes a declaration of her passion to Hippolytus, and he veils his face with shame. Hence the tragedy got the name of *Ἰππόλυτος καλυπτόμενος*. Whether she accused him to her husband before her death, or left the cruel slander written on tablets fastened to her body, is doubtful. Probably the former was the method adopted, as the poet wished to make her as hateful as possible. In the second play we find quite a different view taken of the character of Phædra. The plot is briefly as follows:—

The goddess Aphrodite, being angered with Hippolytus, son of Theseus and the Amazon Hippolyta, because he neglects her worship and devotes himself entirely to the service of the goddess Artemis, and also because she wishes to avenge, in the person of Phædra, wife of Theseus and daughter of Minos and Pasiphae, a slight done her by Phædra's ancestor Helios (the Sun) rouses a violent passion in Phædra for her stepson, Hippolytus. In the first scene we have the entry of the young huntsman, Hippolytus, surrounded by his companions of the chase. In front of the palace-court there are two images, one of Aphrodite and the other of Artemis. For the latter, Hippolytus has woven a chaplet of flowers which he offers. Very beautiful are the words he uses here: 'For thee I have decked this woven chaplet that I bring thee, O lady, from a virgin meadow, where neither the herdsman dares to feed his cattle, nor ever comes the sickle, but the summer bee flits over the mead.' As Hippolytus is about to enter the palace, an old slave advises him to do honour also to the image of Aphrodite, but Hippolytus refuses, and the old man, left alone, prays the goddess not to harm his master. Here we have a charac-

teristically Greek scene. The wild woodland air of the huntsman beloved of Artemis, and his scorn of the goddess of Love; the cautious warning and superstitious reverence of the old slave, make us see where the danger lies.

Then the chorus enters. It consists of women of Trezene. They speak of the secret languor which for some time has been oppressing the queen. They had first heard of it as they washed the purple raiment together at the fountain. They are lost in surmises as to what the cause may be. Has she neglected to offer sacrifice to Dictynna, the goddess adored in her native Crete? Or has Theseus brought a stranger-woman home with him to the palace? Has bad news come from over the water from Athens? Or is childbirth at hand?

Phædra is then brought forward on a couch. She has told her nurse that she wishes to have fresh air and sunlight. The aged attendant breaks forth in a lamentation on the woes of life, and complains that her mistress is for ever shifting in her desires. Phædra, lying restlessly on the couch, bids her maidens raise her up, take off a kerchief from her head, and cast a mantle on her shoulders. Then she begins feverishly to speak her yearning for green fields and woods,—

‘Ah me! would that I might take a draught of clear water from the flowing stream! Would that I might lay me down and take my rest under the poplars in the grassy meadow! Take me to the mountain. I will to the forest and the pines, where roam the dogs of the chase that fall on the dappled stag. Yea, by the gods, I yearn to shout to the hounds and to hurl the Thessalian lance past my yellow hair, holding a barbed spear in my hand.’

Then, again, she says she wishes she were subduing the wild colts in the Palæstra, and finally she breaks down in tears. The chorus asks the nurse if she has tried all means to learn the nature of the disease that afflicts her mistress. She has tried all, but once more she will implore her to tell what it is. She adjures Phædra in the name of her children, whom her death will leave under the tutelage of Hippolytus, to speak out her suffering. At the sound of that name Phædra starts, and bids her nurse not to speak it again. But at length she yields to the entreaties of the aged woman, and tells all. She loves Hippolytus. At this, the nurse and the chorus raise a cry of horror and distress. Then Phædra rising up addresses a speech to the chorus, in which she declares the story of her fatal passion, and how she has determined to put an end to her life. But the nurse, now changing her view of the matter, urges Phædra to yield to her passion. 'Dare to love,' she says. 'A god has willed it so.' Phædra indignantly rejects this counsel. Then the nurse has recourse to stratagem. Under pretence of fetching some philtre which shall cure her mistress, she goes indoors, and tells Hippolytus the whole matter. The chorus then sings an ode in praise of the power of love. At the close Phædra suddenly cries out that she has been betrayed. She hears Hippolytus and the nurse in angry colloquy. Hippolytus curses the nurse for her infamous advice, and inveighs against women in general as the authors of mischief. Then he expresses his determination to exile himself from his father's court. Phædra turns furiously on the nurse, and upbraids her with her treachery. 'May'st thou perish, both thou and whosoever is eager to do his friends an unworthy service!

Out of my sight, and take heed to thyself! I shall order my own course aright.' In these last words we have the intimation of her resolve to slay herself, and in dying to leave behind her an unsullied fame. The chorus swears never to reveal what they have heard, and then chants a strain in which they pray for the wings of a dove to flee away from the horror to come. For, curiously enough, they prophetically describe how Phædra will put an end to herself. At the close of their song a slave-girl rushes out from the palace, and tells that the queen is hanging strangled in a noose. The chorus huddles together in fear and uncertainty what to do. Theseus then comes upon the scene. He wears a chaplet of leaves upon his head, for he has just returned from consulting an oracle. He inquires what the clamour in the house means. He is told that some one is dead. 'Is it one of my children?' he cries. And when he hears that it is his wife, he bids the slaves open the doors that he may view the dead body. By a movement of the *ἐγκύκλιμα*, the inner part of the palace is disclosed and we behold Phædra's body lying there. Theseus bursts forth in exclamations of the most pathetic sorrow, and as he flings himself beside the couch, he suddenly observes tablets in the hands of his dead wife. These he quickly grasps and reads. They contain the lying accusation of Phædra that Hippolytus had insulted her honour; whereupon Theseus prays to Poseidon to make good a promise that the sea-god had given him to grant three wishes. Two had already been fulfilled, and now only one remained. He prays him to bring destruction on Hippolytus. Vainly the chorus warns him that he will yet repent of his rash request,—he will not unsay his

prayer. Then Hippolytus enters. He perceives the dead body of Phædra and asks how she came by her end. Theseus gives no answer, but in a fierce and biting soliloquy demands why heaven has set no mark on wicked men by which to know them, why they have not a voice different from their fellows. All this while Hippolytus stands wondering by, and, innocent, asks the meaning of his father's words. Then Theseus, with bitter irony, turns upon him and demands if this is the end of all his hypocritical axioms, his vows of chastity, his airs of superior wisdom, and his reading of the Orphic poems, and finally thunders out a decree of banishment, forbidding him on pain of death ever to set foot on his native land again. Hippolytus answers in a studiously sober speech. He declares his innocence, but in accordance with his oath given to the nurse, he says nothing of Phædra's guilt. Only, at the end of his speech he adds, 'But whether she through fear destroyed her life, I know not, for I may say no more; but, though unable to be wise, in this she has shown wisdom, and I, though chaste, have fared ill.' No protestations avail him. Theseus is inexorable, and, waxing impatient, orders his attendants to drag his son away. But Hippolytus draws his sword, and threatens to kill whoever touches him. Then, after bidding his sorrowing companions follow him, he sadly takes his departure. The chorus bewails his piteous fortune. As showing the free way in which the Greeks handled the unity of time, this choric interlude is no sooner ended, than a messenger comes in to tell of the fate that has overtaken Hippolytus. This speech, imitated by Seneca and by Racine, has, in the Greek, a perfection of simplicity and picturesqueness of detail

that are quite wanting in both the copies. The messenger (who is evidently one of Hippolytus' humble slaves) describes how he and his fellows were rubbing down the horses at the edge of the sea, when Hippolytus arrived with a company of his friends. Every detail is mentioned of the manner in which he mounted his chariot, and took the reins in his hand, and, appealing to the gods to bear witness to his innocence, drove off on the road to Argos. Scarcely had they got into a lonely part of the shore near the Saronic gulf, than an awful sound was heard like thunder. The horses fling their heads into the air and prick up their ears. Terror seizes on his followers. As they look seaward, they behold a huge wave, like a mountain, moving to the shore. It bursts in seething foam upon the beach, and from its midst there comes forth a bull of hideous aspect. At once the horses are panic-struck, and dash off, the bull following. At last one of the wheels of the chariot strikes against a stone, and Hippolytus, falling out, gets entangled in the reins, and is dragged over the rocks until the traces snap. His body is then left mangled and bleeding on the ground, and the horses, the chariot and the bull disappear from sight in the brushwood. The messenger concludes by asserting that all the women in the world may hang themselves, and every tree in the forest of Ida be covered with letters,—*he* will not believe Hippolytus guilty.

Then comes the last scene of all. The goddess Artemis appears, and addressing herself to Theseus, reveals to him the innocence of his son, and the guilt, or rather, perhaps, the nobility of his wife. Though blaming him for his precipitate action in summoning the vengeance of Poseidon, she yet holds

him excused in that Aphrodite willed these things to be so. Hippolytus is then brought, dying, on the stage. He laments his sad plight and all the wasted purport of his life. 'Vainly,' he says, 'I wrought works of goodness towards men, for lo, I, the just and holy, am departing under the earth to Hades.' The final dialogue between Artemis and her beloved huntsman is exquisitely beautiful and touching, and may be rendered in a less musical tongue thus:—

ART.—Unhappy one! to what a woeful plight thou art yokefellow!  
Thy noble-heartedness has proved thy undoing.

HIPP.—Oh, divine breath of heavenly odour, even in these my sufferings I know thee, and am eased of my pain. Is the goddess Artemis here?

ART.—Yea, she herself, sufferer, thine own best loved goddess.

HIPP.—Dost thou behold my sad plight, O mistress?

ART.—I behold it, but I may shed no tear.

HIPP.—Thou hast no huntsman now, no servant . . .

ART.—No, verily. Thou diest that art well loved by me.

HIPP.—No one to guide thy steeds, or to tend thy images.

ART.—The cruel Aphrodite wrought this woe.

HIPP.—Alas! now I know what divinity has undone me.

ART.—She was grudged her guerdon and was wroth at thy chastity.

HIPP.—Being one, she has destroyed us three.

ART.—Thy father and thee, and thy father's wife.

HIPP.—I groan for my father's hapless plight.

ART.—He was deceived by the counsels of a goddess.

HIPP.—Father, this sorrow makes thee miserable.

Then the heart-broken Theseus answers:—

THES.—I am undone, my child. There is no delight in life to me now.

HIPP.—I weep for thee more than for myself, because of thine error.

THES.—Oh, that I might die for thee, my son!

HIPP.—Ah, the bitter gifts of thy sire Poseidon!

THES.—Would that my lips had never prayed for them!

HIPP.—What then? Thou wouldst have slain me, so wroth wert thou.

THES.—Yea, the gods had blinded my reason.

HIPP.—Alas! is the race of men under the curse of heaven?

Then Artemis once more breaks in, and promises to take vengeance on Aphrodite in the person of Adonis. Divine honours shall be paid to Hippolytus. She bids Theseus take his son in his arms and withdraws, fearing to sully her eyes with the exhalations of death. The dialogue then continues between Theseus and his son:—

HIPP.—I am going. Already I see the gates of the dead.

THES.—Wilt thou leave my soul stained with blood-guiltiness?

HIPP.—Nay, I quit thee of this murder.

THES.—How sayest thou? Dost thou set me free from the pollution of blood?

HIPP.—I take to witness the maiden of the invincible bow.

THES.—Dearest, how nobly dost thou bear thyself towards thy sire!

HIPP.—And thou, too, noblest father! fare thee well!

THES.—Alas, for thy dutiful and righteous heart!

HIPP.—Pray heaven for children noble as myself.

THES.—Leave me not, my child. Take heart!

HIPP.—I can take heart no longer; I am dying, father. Hasten to cover my face with my raiment.

So ends one of the most beautiful tragedies of the ancient world. Nothing ever came from the pen of any writer more purely, tenderly pathetic than this last scene. The divine and



comfortable words of Artemis come upon us with a deep sense of soothing and forgiveness. We rise calmed and ennobled, and the keen poignancy of our grief is done away.

It has already been said that Seneca treated this famous story of Phædra and Hippolytus. Though in most respects a play quite below the level of either Euripides or Racine, his version has some merits which must be noted. It bears indeed all the marks of an age of literary decadence, all the bombast and pomposity which we find in Lucan, Persius and the other writers of the Neronian era, yet it shows felicities of dramatic invention and of poetic expression which entitle it to our admiration.

Nobody nowadays reads Seneca in this country. The German reaction is still strong in the high places of education, and so Seneca is not likely to be a school book in much request for many a long day. But until the criticism of the Lessing-Schlegel school, he was an author in high repute. His tragedies were considered models of eloquence, and Racine has stolen not a few gems of expression from that treasury. But to return to Hippolytus.

The opening of Seneca's play more or less resembles that of Euripides. Hippolytus comes in with his attendant huntsmen; but instead of returning from, he is setting out for, the chase. Then Phædra and her nurse appear, and the former tells of her passion for her step-son. Her language is much less restrained than that of the Greek Phædra. She feels the wild blood of her mother, Pasiphae, raging in her veins, and the curse of Venus on the offspring of the Sun weighs on her soul. Theseus is absent; he has gone down to the Underworld with

his friend Pirithous, to aid him in his bold attempt to carry off Proserpine. As she says :—

*‘Præstatque nuptæ quam solet Theseus fidem.’*

In the next act she appears in the dress of an Amazon, thinking thereby to please the eyes of Hippolytus. Then the nurse addresses a long speech to that obdurate youth, in which she points out to him the folly of allowing his best years to pass loveless away. She adduces in support of her argument many cogent illustrations from natural philosophy, to all which worldly advice Hippolytus turns a deaf ear. Next, Phædra comes on the scene and feigns to be in deep grief. She arouses the sympathy of the young man. By degrees she confesses that love is the cause of her sorrow. ‘Love for your absent husband,’ says Hippolytus. Then comes the confession. As some of the best writing in the play occurs here, one may perhaps be permitted to translate a few lines :—

PHÆDRA.—Thus is it Hippolytus; I love those looks of Theseus which he had of yore when, as a youth, with but the first down of manhood on his cheek, he beheld the dark abode of the Cretan monster, and followed the clue of the thread through the winding ways. How flashing was his beauty then! a fillet held his locks, and a brown-red flushed his delicate cheeks. His arms were soft but sinewy, his face was like Phœbe’s, or my sire the Sun’s. Nay rather, it was thine own. Yea, such was he when he found favour in the eyes of a foe, even so did he bear his head aloft; but in thee there rather shines a wild grace. All thy father is there, but yet something of thy fierce mother mingles an equal beauty. In thy Grecian visage is seen a Scythian sternness. Hadst thou come into Cretan seas with thy sire, my sister would have spun the thread for

thee. This day shall end my suffering or my life. Have pity on her who loves thee!

We see at once the difference in colouring between this and the Greek.

Hippolytus in violent indignation repulses the blandishments of Phædra, and even draws his sword upon her, but, changing his purpose, leaves it in her hands as a polluted thing and rushes off. The nurse then sees her opportunity and cries aloud to the citizens that Hippolytus has attempted to violate her mistress, and in proof shows the sword. In the next act we have Theseus returned from Hades. He asks the nurse why there is a sound of lamentation indoors, and is told that Phædra is determining to slay herself. Phædra then appears, and at first, when questioned, says she would rather die than tell the reason of her distress. Finally, however, she accuses Hippolytus of attempting to dishonour her. Theseus in fury prays to his father, Poseidon, to avenge him on his son. In the next act a messenger comes in and tells the story of Hippolytus' end. Substantially it is the same as Euripides'; but there is no naturalness of narration, and some things are unduly amplified. The monster, for example, is no longer a mere bull, but a grotesque, impossible sea-beast, with a bull's head and a whale's tail, and whose breast and fangs are covered with weed. In the last act Hippolytus' dead body is brought in, and Phædra, wild with grief, flings herself upon it, and, revealing her own guilt, proclaims the innocence of her step-son. 'But in death,' she says, 'we shall not be divided. Frenzied, I shall follow thee through the waters of Tartarus, through the Stygian stream and the river of fire. Oh death,

only healer of my guilty love, oh death, best reparation of my wounded honour, to thee do I fly; make wide thy peaceful bosom!’

And so she stabs herself. This reaches a high point of dramatic intensity. We think of Dante’s Paolo and Francesca eternally whirling through the ‘second circle of sad hell,’ and if we have tears we are prepared to shed them.

These, then, are the models which Racine had to follow; also the life of Theseus as told by Plutarch. It is hardly necessary to say that he has profoundly altered the ancient conception of the character of Phædra. She is no longer the all-but innocent victim of the anger of Aphrodite. We never hear of the old grudge borne by that goddess towards the offspring of the Sun. Hippolyte, too, is not the haughty huntsman who has forsworn love. Far from it,—he has fallen deeply in love with a maiden called Aricie, whom, being the daughter of ancestral foes, he should rather have shunned. Racine says in his preface that he was bound to give his hero some human weaknesses; otherwise his audience would not have tolerated him. Theseus is absent, no one knows where. Phèdre herself gives the lie to the popular idea that he has gone down to Hades, but in her next speech she refers to the legend as if it were true. In place of the old nurse, we have an accomplished court-lady called Œnone, whose evil counsels to Phèdre are rendered the more inexcusable on that account. Aricie herself is a vague personality who floats in and out of the play, and interests us extremely little. Hippolyte himself, though he is the leading character in Euripides, is quite subordinate to Phèdre in Racine. Phèdre, and Phèdre alone, rules the stage.

As for the plot, it is practically the same as Seneca's, except for the Aricie episode. Hippolyte's body is not brought in, for the Frenchman of that day would not have tolerated such a violation of the *convenances*. Horace's maxim of 'Ne coram populo pueros Medea trucidet' had been narrowed down into 'Let no violent action be done on the stage, and let no results of violent action be seen.' The episode in Seneca's play where Theseus pieces together the scattered and mangled limbs of his son is painfully comical, and makes one wonder how the Romans could sit it out and keep their gravity. What a curiously diverse thing the sense of humour is among different peoples! We see nothing amusing in the ghost in 'Hamlet,' but any one who witnesses a performance of that play done in French at the *Théâtre français* will hear a most audible titter go round the house whenever the other-world visitant comes in. The Briton, however, will have his revenge for the slight done his reverential awe of the Ghost,—he will have a laugh at the French notion of Ophelia. She will in all probability behave like the traditional *ingénue* of the French stage, and make some such remark as 'Je l'aime, il m'aime! Oh, que je suis heureuse!' which will have all the honours of the *claque* done it, and never raise a smile. Such, at least, has been my experience. But to return to Phèdre. Anything like the natural, easy grace of the Greek drama would simply have been regarded as rustic, and would have moved laughter. We are always in the court of Louis XIV., and we never get out of it. What have we, then, to make up for this? We have greater variety and excitement. Added to Phèdre's love for Hippolyte we have her violent jealousy of Aricie. No

finer rôle could have been written for a brilliant and capable actress than that of Phèdre. It abounds in telling speeches. The alternations of languor and passionate love and fierce jealousy make it a superlatively fine part for an eminent artist to play. But it requires to be seen *en action*. Was it Charles Lamb who said that Shakespeare was best for the study? This cannot be said of Racine. He is emphatically best for the stage. As reading, he is perhaps rather colourless, but on the stage we can see how perfectly balanced all the parts are, how dramatic and how harmonious,—no roughnesses mar our pleasure. But when we read him, we feel an insufficiency of poetry, of naturalness, of depth. Still, what a fine artist he always is! What a tender grace in all his writing! Joubert has said of him that he is ‘le Virgile des ignorants,’ and there is much in the criticism. Yet what a wonderful substitute for the supreme elegance of Virgil we can find in Racine! Take, for example, from his ‘Phèdre’ such passages as the following:—

‘Ce n’est plus une ardeur dans mes veines cachée,  
C’est Vénus tout entière à sa proie attachée.  
J’ai conçu pour mon crime une juste terreur,  
J’ai pris la vie en haine et ma flamme en horreur,  
Je voulais en mourant prendre soin de ma gloire  
Et dérober au jour une flamme si noire.’

Or again:—

‘Eh bien, connais donc Phèdre et toute sa fureur.  
J’aime. Ne pense pas qu’au moment que je t’aime  
Innocente à mes yeux je m’approuve moi-même,  
Ni que du fol amour qui trouble ma raison  
Ma lâche complaisance ait nourri le poison.’

Objet infortuné des vengeances célestes,  
 Je m'abhorre encor plus que tu ne me détestes.  
 Les Dieux m'en sont témoins, ces Dieux qui dans mon flanc  
 Ont allumé le feu fatal à tout mon sang,  
 Ces Dieux qui se sont fait une gloire cruelle  
 De séduire le cœur d'une faible mortelle.'

Or, again, take this very Virgilian passage:—

'Miséable! Et je vis? Et je soutiens la vue  
 De ce sacré Soleil dont je suis descendue?  
 J'ai pour aïeul le Père et le maître des Dieux;  
 Le Ciel, tout l'Univers est plein de mes aïeux.  
 Où me cacher? Fuyons dans la Nuit infernale.—  
 Mais que dis-je? Mon père y tient l'urne fatale;  
 Le Sort, dit-on, l'a mise en ses sévères mains.  
 Minos juge aux Enfers tous les pâles humains.  
 Ah! combien frémira son Ombre épouvantée,  
 Lorsqu'il verra sa fille à ses yeux présentée,  
 Contrainte d'avouer tant de forfaits divers,  
 Et des crimes peut-être inconnus aux Enfers!'

Doubtless Seneca is responsible for many of the turns of phrase here employed. But yet how unlike Seneca in its measured majesty! How much more like Virgil! How Greek, too, how Sophoclean, is the speech of the messenger who tells of Hippolyte's cruel death! With what a stately simplicity it commences:—

'A peine nous sortions des portes de Trézène,  
 Il était sur son char,' etc.

'Andromaque' and 'Phèdre' are perhaps the nearest modern approaches to Greek tragedy. Shakespeare's plays are a world away from the Greek conception of tragic art. In fact, the plays of Shakespeare—I mean the tragic plays—are not strictly tragedies at all. They are dramas. For, after all,

Aristotle's definition of tragedy still remains the only true one. There must be simplicity, unity, austerity, in the highest tragic art. It must deal with high passions, great characters and striking events. Aristotle goes even so far as to say that the characters of tragedy should be in kingly place, and it surely cannot be doubted that kings and heroes are fitter subjects for tragedy than men and women in the ranks of life. The more democratic we become, the more it will be seen by better minds that the characters and conditions of average modern life do not lend themselves to the tragedian's art. Plays that deal with ordinary love-crimes, with physiological depravities or social problems, are not real tragedies. They are distressing dramas. It may very well be that the conception of tragedy as held by the Greeks of the age of Pericles, or by Frenchmen of the age of Louis XIV., may finally and altogether disappear from most men's minds. Indeed in England it has already long since done so. But there will always be a few who, while acknowledging Shakespeare's supreme claims to our admiration as a poet, will yet hold that his conception of tragedy is on a lower plane than that of Sophocles and Racine.

And now we come to the two plays which were written when Racine had withdrawn from the stage and become *dévot*. Speculation will always inquire whether it was pique on account of Pradon's popularity or genuine conversion which wrought the change. Perhaps both had their influence. But it would seem not unnatural to imagine that the nursling of Port-Royal, the sensitive and tender-souled poet who through all his mundane court-life had still



cherished as an ideal the Christian example of those great 'Solitaries,' should have been thrown back, by a revulsion of feeling, on the teaching of his youth. Be that as it may, no other profane works came from his pen. We have nothing but 'Esther,' 'Athalie,' the 'Imitation' and the 'Hymnes.' Of these, 'Athalie' is incomparably the greatest work. Perhaps it is the finest of all his plays. The subject was in complete harmony with his new zeal for religion, and his powers were at their height. There is, therefore, a sentiment of supreme dedication in this play, heart and head, as it were, acting together in complete harmony. The characters of Joad and Mathan stand forth with a strength and grandeur that Racine never gave to any other of his male creations. The former is the very incarnation of the haughty High Priest, jealous for the honour of a jealous Deity, and implacable in the service of his God. The latter typifies the arrogant and ambitious apostate, who cloaks his real self-seeking under a feigned zeal for the glory of a genial Power—in whom, however, he confesses he does not believe. In the mouth of Joad are the thunders of the law, in that of Mathan the words of revolt against the people who slew his Midianitish ancestors.

'Ami, peux-tu penser que d'un zèle frivole  
Je me laisse aveugler pour une vaine idole,  
Pour un fragile bois, que malgré mon secours  
Les vers sur son autel consomment tous les jours?'

he says in his frank way. It might perhaps be objected that he is made, to a certain extent, merely the spokesman of the poet's own dislike of Paganism. Surely no character ought to be allowed to condemn himself in the unblushing

manner in which Mathan condemns himself. He is describing the steps by which he rose at the king's court :

'J'étudiai leur cœur, je flattai leurs caprices,  
Je leur semai de fleurs le bord des précipices ;  
Près de leurs passions rien ne me fut sacré,  
De mesure et de poids je changeais à leur gré.  
Autant que de Joad l'inflexible rudesse  
De leur superbe oreille offensait la mollesse,  
Autant je les charmais par ma dextérité,  
Dérobant à leurs yeux la triste vérité,  
Prêtant à leurs fureurs des couleurs favorables,  
Et prodigue surtout du sang des misérables.'

Here Mathan really gives himself away, so to speak. Richard III., in Shakespeare's play, is also made the spokesman of the dramatist's coloured conception of the character. He says, as we all remember :

'As I am subtle, false and treacherous.'

This is very questionable art. It is a form of playing to the gallery, as we say. To the popular imagination in the days of Elizabeth, the Hunchback had become a sort of ogre, denaturalised, dehumanised. And in like manner, to the pious court of Versailles the High Priest of a Pagan faith was merely a monster. The quality of imaginative sympathy, which Arnold called the distinguishing feature of our times, was unknown in the seventeenth century. The opening lines of the play are among the finest in dramatic literature. They strike the keynote of the play at once, but yet not too loudly.

'Oui, je viens dans son temple adorer l'Eternel.  
Je viens, selon l'usage antique et solennel,  
Célébrer avec vous la fameuse journée,  
Où sur le mont Sina la loi nous fut donnée.'

Every one knows the famous 'Songe d'Athalie,' and so it is

hardly necessary to quote it. What a master of language Racine shows himself here!—

‘Ma mère Jézabel devant moi s’est montrée  
Comme au jour de sa mort pompeusement parée.’

And yet how apt these words would be to fail of their charm to an English ear, from the mere fact that the word *pompeusement* would instantly suggest ‘pompously’ in all its ludicrous connotation! (What a tragedy there is in the degradation of words! The French language is not without examples of this. The word *ennui* once meant ‘sorrow,’ but now it only means ‘boredom,’—at least, in ordinary speech. It is still used in the older sense in poetry.) It has been well said that the *grand rôle* of the play is really that of Jehovah. One feels that the human personages are merely puppets moving on to appointed ends, and that the moving spirit of the play comes from between the cherubim. God’s vengeance on the wicked is the real argument. In Greek tragedy the oracle of Delphi occasionally plays a somewhat similar rôle, but not with the same insistent presence and impressiveness. We only hear echoes from the rock of the Pythoness’ cave; but in ‘*Athalie*’ the very voice of Sinai speaks through Joad.

‘L’arche sainte est muette et ne rend plus d’oracles,’

says Abner, and Joad replies :

‘Et quel temps fut jamais si fertile en miracles ?  
Quand Dieu par plus d’effets montra-t-il son pouvoir ?  
Auras-tu donc toujours des yeux pour ne point voir,  
Peuple ingrat ? Quoi, toujours les plus grandes merveilles  
Sans ébranler ton cœur frapperont tes oreilles ?  
Faut-il, Abner, faut-il vous rappeler le cours  
Des prodiges fameux accomplis en nos jours ?

Des Tyrans d'Israël les célèbres disgrâces,  
 Et Dieu trouvé fidèle en toutes ses menaces ;  
 L'impie Achab détruit, et de son sang trempé  
 Le champ que par le meurtre il avait usurpé ;  
 Près de ce champ fatal Jézabel immolée,  
 Sous les pieds des chevaux cette Reine foulée ;  
 Dans son sang inhumain les chiens désaltérés,  
 Et de son corps hideux les membres déchirés ;  
 Des Prophètes menteurs la troupe confondue,  
 Et la flamme du Ciel sur l'autel descendue ?'

'Esther' must have been a revelation to the poet himself. He had been asked by Madame de Maintenon to write a sacred play for her young noblewomen at St. Cyr, who were anxious, apparently, to have some private theatricals. One can imagine the delight with which a piece like this must have been welcomed. *Pièces d'occasion* are not apt to be successes; but this one, like Milton's 'Comus,' was a permanent addition to the literary trophies of the age. It aroused the interest of the king, who insisted upon witnessing a performance. He was delighted with it. All the characters were taken by the girls, and they had musical choruses to aid the general effect. Some of the best writing in the play is contained in these choruses, *e.g.*

'O rives du Jourdain ! O champs aimés des Cieux !'

Or again—

'Tel qu'un ruisseau docile  
 Obéit à la main qui détourne son cours,  
 Et, laissant de ses eaux partager le secours,  
 Va rendre tout un champ fertile.'

Happy, indeed, the boarding-school which is in such a case, which has a Racine for dramatic poet, a Madame de Main-

tenon as Principal, and where, when acting is forward, the Court of France is audience !

It now remains for me to attempt to sum up the impression made on one by a comparative study of Racine and other dramatists. It would almost seem that in what I have said I had a fixed determination to contrast Racine unfavourably with the Greeks. Such, however, has not been my intention so much as to show how Racine breathed another spirit into the fair dead limbs of the Greek drama. He did not seek to reproduce (he could not if he had tried) the free, frank life of Hellas. Christianity, chivalry and feudalism had passed over the world, and had quickened much and destroyed much. Life did not look the same in the reign of Louis XIV. as in the archonship of Pericles. All dramatic art centred in the Court of Louis XIV., and Bossuet was one of the spectators to be reckoned with.

But what *was* open to Racine he took advantage of with the most beautiful result. He adopted the famous personages of the ancient world, and fusing their characters in the alembic of his mind, he reproduced them in a new and fascinating aspect, and one which could appeal to his fellow-countrymen. As has already been said, Heine, in the course of one of his invectives against Schlegel, accuses him of critical incapacity for not perceiving that Racine's plays are, as he phrases it, a ' piquante mascarade,' not an imitation of the Greek originals.

It is sometimes interesting, but often misleading, to take an analogy from the arts of painting or music when one is talking about literature. Were one to hazard such an analogy here, one might perhaps say that Racine is in literature what Claude

is in painting. Clear outline, mellow tone, harmony, softness, these are all qualities common to the artist and the poet. Turner, on the other hand, with his wild magnificence of colouring, and defiant boldness of form, where yet supreme ordering governs all, might be a fitting artist to compare with Shakespeare. Side by side in the National Gallery hang two pictures, both representing the building of Carthage—the one all calm and clear, the other all pomp and pageantry and glowing lights,—typical each of the nationality of its painter.

Or again, in the sphere of Music, we might say that Shakespeare finds an analogy in Beethoven or Wagner, Racine in Mozart. But, after all, such analogies are fanciful, and if pushed to the conclusion, false.

## THE POETRY OF ALFRED DE MUSSET

NOTHING, perhaps, more puzzles the literary Englishman than the decided preference which most Frenchmen give to Alfred de Musset over Victor Hugo. How to account for a taste which, in Mr. Ruskin's words, 'sets the gleaming euphrasy above the dark branches of Dodona'? Very possibly the answer to the problem is to be found in that rule of laziness which is a law of popular taste, no less certainly than of etymology. Victor Hugo is to many Frenchmen, what Browning is, though for other and more excusable reasons, to most Englishmen, a sublime incomprehensible. The mental effort required to enjoy him is more than the *homme sensuel moyen* feels inclined to bestow. We should remember Gilead P. Beck's laudable efforts to master our jerky bard and his lack of success, and apply the same principle and extend the same indulgence to the Gilead P. Becks of France. Only those to whom Melpomene has granted a more benignant smile at birth have sufficient love of poetry to make efforts.

Let us take another familiar example from our own literature. How many thousands are there who read Mr. Lewis Morris, compared with the few who read Rossetti? To many, no doubt, the 'Epic of Hades,' with its facile versification and

obvious meanings and morals, is the masterpiece of the nineteenth century, precisely as, to myriads of Americans, 'Evangeline' or 'Miles Standish' is the noblest poem ever penned, and 'The Psalm of Life' the profoundest utterance of the human soul.

By which considerations we must not be led to imagine that Alfred de Musset occupies merely the level of an imitative poet whose ear is thronged with echoes from the heights of song around him. Alfred de Musset has in him a distinct vein of originality and charm, which he owes to none but *Dame Nature*. 'Mon verre n'est pas grand, mais je bois dans mon verre,' he says of himself to those who accuse him of being an imitator of Byron, and his poems bear him out. He has a far truer, subtler, keener insight into beauty than the magnificent rhetorician whom he so greatly admired. Byron was as incapable of writing a piece of delicate and purely sensuous verse, such as the introduction to 'Rolla,' or the address to the evening star in 'Le Saule,' as was Musset of writing the description of the storm in 'Don Juan.' Such lines as

' Etoile qui descend sur la verte colline,  
Triste larme d'argent du manteau de la nuit,  
Toi que regarde au loin le pâtre qui chemine  
Tandis que pas à pas son long troupeau le suit,'

have in their quality something of that which gives charm to the Eclogues of Virgil or the pictures of Millet. There is in them a tender grace which one might read all that Byron ever wrote without finding, a feeling for beauty for beauty's sake, which is akin to the genius of Keats. The French poet is an



authentic child of Apollo and the Muse, whereas, were *recherches de paternité* allowed in such a case, we might perhaps say that Byron was begotten on her in some wild moment by a wandering demi-god.

De Musset's early poems, 'Contes d'Espagne et d'Italie,' have a rollicking recklessness of inspiration about them that reminds one of Boccaccio. The 'Lays of Lawless Love' they might well be entitled. One and all are concerned with the tender passion in more or less questionable shape. The 'mad, sad, bad, glad' 'Ballade à la Lune' is perhaps the most grievous offender against the decencies, and the poem which, more than others, incurred the anathemas of the stricter sect. The Legislators of Parnassus had also a word to say about its audacious contempt of received rules of style. To compare the moon hanging over a steeple to a dot on an 'i' was a licence not to be tolerated. And then, the strange sights that the virgin Phœbe beheld! But, naturally, since the days of Endymion she had grown less coy.

Heretical as these early poems are, most of them have a sad and tragic ending, by which de Musset did not, by any means, wish to point a moral, but only to adorn a tale. The sadness is but the luxury of grief which young poets affect. He felt, like Edgar Allan Poe, that love and death are the two most poetical things that be, and so he makes his lovers come to dust at the end. Poison or a dagger is their favourite means of making away with themselves. Thus, in 'Dom Paez' the hero seeks out an old witch, who brews him a love-philtre which first acts as a fierce aphrodisiac and then as a deadly poison. Having drunk this, he goes to see his faithless lady

for the last time, and, after a night of wild and frantic orgy, he stabs her and expires. (It may be remarked by the way how true that saying of Heine is, that the French are in all things too serious. A sense of humour would have prevented an English poet from making his hero drink an excitant and then visit his mistress. To the French mind there is nothing necessarily ludicrous here—only a heightening of intensity.) The last lines of the poem are an utterance of the poet himself, which recalls the sad serenity and solemnity of a Greek chorus.

‘ Pour moi, j’estime qu’une tombe  
Est un asile sûr où l’espérance tombe,  
Où pour l’éternité l’on croise les deux bras  
Et dont les endormis ne se réveillent pas.’

In ‘Les Marrons du Feu’ we are introduced to a most engaging young rake called Rafaël, who, in one form or another, is constantly appearing in de Musset’s work. He is one of the avatars of Don Juan—a character which seems to have possessed an extreme fascination for the poet. Whether he be called Rafaël, or Etur, or Mardoche, or Dalti, it is always the same man, πολλῶν ὀνομάτων μορφὴ μία.

In ‘Portia’ we have the tale of a young Venetian fisher-lad, who makes a lucky hit at a gambling-table, comes to Rome, and is loved by a married lady of noble family. Her husband is an elderly man, a Florentine, who is terribly jealous of his young wife. He surprises the two lovers at a *rendez-vous*, and falls beneath Dalti’s rapier. Then Dalti confesses to Portia that he is a ruined man, and that nothing remains to him but his fishing-boat. Will she abide by him or not? She hesitates, but finally chooses to remain with him. We do not hear of the

sequel. The idea of the high-born lady sinking to the level of one of those 'rough wives that scream against the gulls' is not an agreeable one.

For the palm of gently-graceful, graceless cynicism 'Mardoche' and 'Namouna' rival one another. Neither can be held to have any special plot or purpose, except to portray two different phases of the fascinating, easy-going Don Juanesque character. Mardoche, with his inability to grasp the all too official piety of his worthy uncle the curé, and his light and airy confidence in a Voltairian *bon Dieu*, who rather favours amorous escapades than otherwise, and the curé himself, with his half-hearted protests against the naughtiness of his pet nephew, and his real sympathy, which goes so far as to make him lend his own *presbytère* as a shelter for the intrigue, form such a roguish pair as we must think Menander would have loved to deal with. Then the serio-comic *dénouement*, in which the irate husband appears as an inopportune *deus ex machinâ* and orders his wife off to a nunnery, while Mardoche leaps out of the window and sprains his ankle in his fall, has the same laughter-moving quality as the unsuccessful exploits of Sir John Falstaff.

'Namouna,' which is the longest and most desultory of all the Don Juanesque poems, is also the one in which the Byronic influence is perhaps most perceptible. There is so far from being any definite plot, that the one bit of action in the poem does not take place till the last verses of the last canto. The whole poem might be styled a study in Orientalism. The first stanza introduces us to a lazy, lounging, Turkified Frenchman, called Hassan, lying naked

on a sofa. Thereafter to the end of the poem, we have nothing but humorous, witty, sarcastic disquisitions on matters literary, artistic, and ethical. The point of the whole story lies in this,—that the hero of it gets brought to him at the beginning of every month two beautiful girls, whom he dismisses at the end of it. Once, however, a young Spanish maiden called Namouna, who had been pirated from Cadiz and sold to a Jewish slave-owner, Hassan's purveyor in this kind, falls in love with her new master, and, after having been sent away at the month's end, finds a means of being brought back to Hassan's harem. What ultimately happens is left unsaid. On this slender thread some scores of brilliant, irrelevant verses have been strung, all written with a graceful, careless facility that wins admiration from one in spite of one's self.

'*La Coupe et les Lèvres*' is the most ambitious in scope of all the early poems. There is something of the dignity of tragedy in the conception of the young huntsman Frank, who, goaded by ambition and want of success in the chase, refuses all offers of help and kindness from his companions, and, after cursing his father's house, departs into the world and wave of men. He meets on the way Belcolore and her squire Stranio. He slays the latter and rides off with Belcolore, with whom he lives for a time; but, discovering her mercenary nature, he leaves her and joins a band of soldiers, whose captain he becomes. One day he tries their allegiance by giving out that he is dead; then, disguised as a monk, he makes his own funeral oration, in which he declares all his evil deeds, thereby rousing the fury of the soldiers against their late

leader. Then Belcolore comes upon the scene, and laments over the bier. The monk tries to cheer her by representing to her that Frank had been no such hero. Then he tempts her by laying piles of jewellery and gold pieces on the empty coffin. Belcolore is on the point of yielding to his suit, when Frank declares himself, and drives her away with curses. Thereafter he returns home and betrothes himself to a maid who had long loved him, called Deidamia. On their wedding-night Belcolore appears at a window of the hut and contrives to stab Deidamia to the heart, and so the tragedy ends.

'A Quoi Rêvent les Jeunes Filles' is a piece of brilliant and charming nonsense, which takes a high rank among de Musset's early works. Ninon and Ninette are two romantic girls who, as their father the Duke Laërte says, dream of lovers that serenade them and climb up to their bedroom windows on silken rope-ladders, sword in hand and a mantle over their eyes. Like Lydia Languish, they are averse to hum-drum notions of courtship and marriage, and their father, wishing to humour them, prepares a little surprise for them. He induces the lover of Ninon, Silvio by name, to join him in making a nocturnal attack on his daughter's apartments, in which is also involved the duke's nephew, Irus, a senseless fop, who is also a suitor for the hand of Ninon. Things end very happily by Silvio marrying Ninon, and Irus donning a new costume.

But for the afore-cited verses to the evening star, 'Le Saule' is one of the least successful of the early poems. The sentimentality is too flaccid, and the tale of woe too vague and unsatisfactory. Besides, how can one sympathise with a heroine who is called Miss Smolen?

One little lyrical gem must be quoted from a set of verses  
 'A Juana':—

'Le temps emporte sur son aile  
 Et le printemps et l'hirondelle,  
 Et la vie et les jours perdus.  
 Tout s'en va comme la fumée,  
 L'espérance et la renommée,  
 Et moi qui vous ai tant aimée,  
 Et toi qui ne t'en souviens plus.'

When compared with the youthful lyrics of our own greater Alfred Tennyson, how much more pure and graceful these lines appear than all the 'airy, fairy Lilian' twaddle! It is a pity there are not more of them. We could well have spared many 'Suzons' for one or two such bright bursts of song as 'Le Lever' and 'Venise.' The first-mentioned poem is a hideous mixture of Italian Renaissance lust and cruelty, and all unworthy to be told in such admirable verse. The motive is obscene and horrible, and should have been deemed beneath a poet's choice.

This completes a more or less full survey of de Musset's early poems. According to Mr. Swinburne, we have now done with his best work, and have nothing but partial successes and dead failures before us. Heine said of the poet, that he was 'un jeune homme avec un très beau passé.' Mr. Swinburne approves of the sarcasm, but it is much to be doubted if French criticism would admit that the second sheaf of poems is inferior to the first. The reverse would be the more likely verdict. Much had happened meanwhile to the poet to deepen and sadden his feelings about life. His famous *liaison* and

rupture with George Sand had taken place, and all his after-poetry was affected by it.

This is not the place for a disquisition on the rights and wrongs of that *cause célèbre*. Much is to be said for Mr. Swinburne's view of their life in Venice, that she was a man and he was a woman in that kingdom by the sea, and that if Elfrida did not behave like a lady, certainly George did not behave like a gentleman. This is probably a very just view, for there was more of the man in George Sand, that woman *masculæ libidinis masculique ingenii*, than in Alfred de Musset, and he had all a woman's sensitiveness and caprice.

'Rolla,' the first poem of the second series, is, whatever else we may think of it, a most noteworthy production. Its opening lines are among the finest in all French literature. Full, strong, rich and harmonious, they once for all refute the prevalent English notion that French harmony is necessarily thin and poor. To translate them adequately would be indeed a hard task, but their meaning, if not their music, may be rendered thus:—

'Dost yearn for days when heaven's Divinities  
 Moved 'mid a godlike folk in mortal guise,  
 When virgin Venus, child of bitter seas,  
 Scattered her mother's tear-drops to the breeze,  
 And sleeked her tresses till the whole world teemed?  
 Dost yearn for days when nymphs' bright shoulders gleamed  
 And glided 'mid the lilies of the lake  
 The while with petulant laugh they strove to wake  
 The lazy fauns that couched among the sedge?  
 When still the fair youth kissed the water's edge,  
 Young Hercules still ranged the world in might,  
 Quelling all wrong with even-handed right,

His manhood mantled in a lion's fell;  
 And mocking sylvans swung in every dell  
 Upon the springy branches of the oak,  
 And whistled back the songs of passing folk ?'

It has been bitterly said of this poem, that in it de Musset flings the dregs of 'Rolla's' absinthe into the face of Voltaire. The fine apostrophe beginning 'Dors-tu content, Voltaire ?' with its fierce irony and broken-hearted reproach, however unjust to the memory of a great man, and however inconsequent in its deductions from his teaching, forms a magnificent piece of declamatory rhetoric. There was a time in life when some of us perhaps imagined that 'Rolla' was the wickedest, saddest, most deeply touching poetry ever penned,—a time when one mistook one's own shadow for the very pit of hell. But a few years on, how shrunk and changed it all seemed ! The growing frivolity of age makes one take less seriously what long ago seemed so serious. The vulgarity of the 'Rollas' of real life makes one so incredulous of the Rolla of fiction. Still, there are passages of such exquisite poetry in it that, false and mawkish as the poem is as a whole, we must admit that it constitutes one of the poet's gravest claims to renown.

'Une Bonne Fortune' is, of all de Musset's poems, the most amiable and sweet in tone and inspiration. It tells how the poet, finding himself short of cash in Baden-Baden, gave his last franc to a little boy who was walking with his nurse, and who was weeping because he had nothing to give to the beggars. He afterwards meets the little boy's mother, who is an Englishwoman. She thanks the poet most graciously.



He had, by this time, received money from home, and one night he staked a few coins at the gaming-table upon the number which the lady pointed out to him. As luck would have it, he won a heap of gold, and that was the end of his *bonne fortune*.

'Lucie' is perhaps one of the most popular of de Musset's poems, because it is short, and because its sentiment is very sentimental and simple, and also because the verses are most musical. We are all familiar with the picture of the maiden seated at the organ, and the long-haired æsthetic youth at her side gazing at her with eager eyes. The picture has completely caught the spirit of the poem. There is an insipidity about both which renders them inferior art, but both have their charm. One beautiful line redeems the poem, and gives the picture its *raison d'être*:—

'Fille de la douleur, Harmonie, Harmonie !'

The stanzas to 'La Malibran' are often considered to be among the best things of the poet. Fine they undoubtedly are, and one especially fine stanza may perhaps be quoted—

'O Maria-Félicia, le peintre et le poète  
Laissent en expirant d'immortels héritiers ;  
Jamais l'affreuse nuit ne les prend tout entiers ;  
A défaut d'action leur grande âme inquiète  
De la mort et du temps entreprend la conquête,  
Et frappés dans la lutte ils tombent en guerriers.'

As a tribute from a poet to an actress, they must take a higher rank than Matthew Arnold's Sonnets to Rachel. Indeed, the first stanzas can take the very highest rank among elegiac

poems. The rest of the poem shows rather a falling off. Here and there, there are beautiful lines, *e.g.* :—

‘Ou faut-il croire, hélas, ce que disaient nos pères,  
Que lorsqu’on meurt si jeune on est aimé des dieux!’

But, on the whole, the falling off continues to the close, except, perhaps, the concluding lines :—

‘Meurs donc ; ta mort est douce et ta tâche est remplie.  
Ce que l’homme ici-bas appelle le génie  
C’est le besoin d’aimer ; hors de là tout est vain.  
Et puisque tôt ou tard l’amour humain s’oublie,  
Il est d’une grande âme et d’un heureux destin  
D’expirer comme toi pour un amour divin.’

On the whole, ‘*Les Nuits*’ must be pronounced de Musset’s masterpiece, and with a few words about them, this essay closes. Taken together, they form his most considerable poetical venture, and they are the most mature fruits of his genius. They are more sustained in quality, more chastened, more perfect than his other long poems. From that night in May, when the Muse comes to the poet and bends lovingly over him, and, harp in hand, strives to move him from his heavy sorrow; through the drear night in December, when the spirit of solitude, in the likeness of a sable-clad youth ‘qui lui ressemblait comme un frère,’ makes itself known to him; through that wild night in August, when the poet passionately rejects the remonstrance of his Muse, and vows that, untaught by suffering, he will love till love slay him; on to that calmer night in October, when, his mistress’ treason all forgot, he dedicates himself once more to poetry and bursts forth into lyric rapture, there are no false notes, no faltering. Each night has its own colouring and tone; the night in May,

tender, sweet, a delicate breath of spring moving everywhere; the December night, sad, funereal, spectre-haunted; the August evening, with its hot breath and withered flowers, and wild pulsations in the blood; and the night in October, subdued, russet-coloured and calm, with keen air bracing slack resolves to courage and the firm pursuit of art. The May night excels in breadth and sweetness and majesty; the December night in sombre intensity; the August night in passion, and the October night in grave beauty. No finer piece of descriptive verse was ever written, than that which tells about the love of the pelican for its young,—the *pelicanus pius* of sacred symbolism. May one dare attempt to transmute the golden French into silver, or rather copper, English?

‘When, weary with far flight, the pelican  
 ’Mid mists of evening gets him to his reeds,  
 His hungry bantlings seeing him afar  
 Swoop on the waters, scud along the shore,  
 In eager race to tear the dainty prey;  
 And fluttering round their sire with screams of joy  
 Shake their ungainly pouches. He, with slow,  
 Sad steps, ascends a lofty rock, and thence,  
 (Shelt’ring his brood with drooping wing the while)  
 A melancholy fisher, scans the sky.  
 Blood flows in streams from his gashed bosom. Vain  
 Was all his quest; the ocean depths were void,  
 Barren the beach; naught but his heart he brings.  
 Sombre and silent, stretched upon the stone,  
 He doles his entrails to his offspring, love  
 Divine quite conquering pain. He sees the flow  
 Of life-blood from his breast, and, trembling, sinks  
 Dizzy with intense pleasure, horror and joy.  
 But sometimes, ere the sacrifice accomplished,  
 Being loath to die thus slowly, and afraid  
 His children leave him living, he arises,

And spreading forth his wide wings to the wind,  
 And striking at his heart with savage cry,  
 He wails to the night such terrible farewell  
 That sea-birds quit the shore, and far away  
 The traveller belated, feeling death  
 Pass on the breeze, commends himself to God.'

And, for exquisite and poignant lyrical utterance, could aught excel the concluding lines of the poem?

'Mais j'ai souffert un dur martyre,  
 Et le moins que j'en pourrais dire,  
 Si je l'essayais sur ma lyre,  
 La briserait comme un roseau.'

Among all the 'cloudy trophies' of the melancholy Muse, the December night must take a mournful eminence. Sad, unutterably sad, but sweet though in sadness, its ever-recurring line, 'Qui me ressemblait comme un frère,' falls on the ear like the persistent, muffled throb of a passing-bell. The night in August, with its hot breath searing the vervain on the window-sill, and the sad Muse leaning her weary head upon the door-post of her loved poet, entreating him to return to her and to forget his earthly love, and the wild *θέλω θέλω μανῆναι* ('après avoir aimé il faut aimer toujours'), with which the poem ends, is indeed a memorable night, but less memorable, perhaps, and assuredly less welcome, than the night in October, when, old sorrows healed, the poet recounts to the Muse his sad experience and 'all his hourly varied anodynes,' and receives from her forgiveness and inspiration renewed. Forgoing sorrow is the condition of joy, she tells him—'la joie a pour symbole une plante brisée'—the heavenly powers

make themselves known only to those who have watered their couch with their tears.

It would take too much space to speak of the concluding poems of this series, gem-like and beautiful as some of them are, notably that sweet song of Fortunio,—

‘Si vous croyez que je vais dire  
Qui j’ose aimer?’

or that other to ‘Mimi Pinson,’ or the adieu to ‘Suzon’ with its plaintive refrain, ‘bien loin, bien vite.’ Unrivalled for gracefulness and delicacy, those little poems of his have an enduring quality which will save them when many more ambitious works have gone to the deeps of oblivion. De Musset, if not one of the great poets of the century (and a place can hardly be allotted him where Tennyson and Hugo stand), yet remains one of the sweetest and most graceful of all time.

## PAUL BOURGET<sup>1</sup>

M. PAUL BOURGET is the inventor—or thereabouts—of what is called ‘la psychologie contemporaine.’ A few years back to be ‘psychological’ was to be everything in fiction. To turn round and ‘approve your science of anthropometry’ dispassionately on your contemporaries was to be superior, and to win the marrowless but refined applause of your peers. And thus it fell out that M. Paul Bourget was hailed of all superior France as a ‘penseur distingué,’ ‘un psychologue de premier ordre,’ and all the amazing rest.

Has he now arrived? Was ‘Le Disciple’ his long-foreseen and long-ambitioned goal? To some, perchance, this novel might appear (in a figure) as a sort of half-way house: a pike-keeper’s hut, as it were, and not in any sense a Temple of Fame. But such dullards would but show that they underestimate the craving of a semi-educated public for a *farrago* of ‘passionnel’ detail and pseudo-scientific treatment. It is otherwise *chez nous*. We have got no further than the disintegration of

<sup>1</sup> This essay originally appeared in the ‘Modern Men’ series of the *National Observer* when that review was under the spirited direction of Mr. Henley. According to his editorial custom he heightened my poor efforts with strong expressions of individual opinion; so that should this paper ever come under M. Bourget’s famous *monocle* that distinguished writer will know whom to blame.

religious belief and the hesitations and heart-reachings of saintly susceptible curates. But then, we are full three-quarters of a century behind. They got over that sort of thing in France somewhere about the fifties; and for all their Zolas and their Bonnetains, the appearance (or the recrudescence) of another George Sand would create a public scandal. Painting and literature are 'quick-change artistes' there; and phase succeeds to phase like figures in a kaleidoscope or (to use a nobler metaphor) the political views of statesmen out of place. French poetry has rushed at express speed through the several regions known as Romantisme, Parnassiénisme, Décadence, Symbolisme, Incohérence, Déliquescence, and looks as if its future were in the hands of any Bedlamitish group that cares to take on the responsibility of being more lunatical than those that went before. French painting and French fiction have proceeded on much the same frantic lines. And were it not that the peculiar excellence of the French mind is that it will pursue its ideas to the bitter end, man's comfort in France were small indeed. But it is ever her way to work herself out in a given direction, and violently revert to something else. So that M. Zola is probably the grandfather *malgré lui* of another Mme. Cottin, M. Bourget the unconscious true-begetter of another Alexandre Dumas.

As for 'Le Disciple,' it is obviously the work of a man able enough to master more or less the ideas of men like Schopenhauer, Hegel, and Herbert Spencer,—in short, a very superior person, who, further, being a Frenchman and the subject of a rigorous literary training, could not but write well. Not from M. Bourget need one look for the vapid, slipshod style of

many English writers whose insular renown is vast. His writing, as Arnold would have said, is 'of the centre.' It is often affected, sometimes mawkish, generally sentimental; but it is never provincial, never 'gushing,' never vulgar. By his diction, moreover, he is in the direct line of Molière and Musset. He writes French, that is; and if he condescend upon neologisms and the technology of philosophy and science, it is that he is a superior person, and cannot help it. In 'Le Disciple,' he tells you how a nice young man (not unlike M. Paul Bourget: so he confesses in his preface) goes rather badly wrong, and, being shot by the heroine's brother, is left a corpse in the street. The idea (for of course it is a novel with a purpose) is to show that philosophic and scientific teaching may very likely undermine the morals of ingenuous and receptive youth; and who shall say that M. Bourget has not discovered a real danger? Here, for example, is an aged sage with irreproachable habits and a tremendous power of philosophic synthesis—a sort of latter-day Spinoza—whose works are devoured by a neurotic young man of a speculative turn and a fascinating address. Now, the neurotic young man, being tutor in a noble family, falls in love with the lovely daughter of the house and deliberately sets about her seduction; fancies, in brief, that he is 'une âme de proie,' and proceeds to behave as such. Marriage is out of the question, for she is noble and he is *bourgeois*; and in the end the young lady finds herself under the necessity of taking poison. He is suspected of murder; and in prison he pens a long confession to his master, which fills that good gentleman with consternation. Could such faultless philosophy lead to such faulty living?



How dreadful! Had it been a married woman—well, well! But *une jeune fille*! O, horrible, and horrible once more, and again most horrible! As for an elopement *pour le bon motif*, such a breach of decorum is to the average French mind far more bewildering than any amount of adultery, and so correct a young man as M. Paul Bourget (a young man, too, whose admirers boast of his countless *succès auprès des dames*) could never dream of anything so underbred. On the other hand, it is a matter for regret that so very distinguished a thinker as M. Bourget should have made his leader of thought a man whose writings read like Herbert Spencer gone daft. But, to do him justice, he knows exactly how to ‘fetch’ the semi-educated public in France, just as our writers of theological romances know how to ‘fetch’ the semi-educated of these islands. Ourselves prefer a hero whose faith in the Thirty-nine Articles is beginning to waver, or who has doubts about Eternal Punishment, but whose morals are of the ice-brook’s temper till the end. They must have a young man whose notions of a deity are fading into thin air, and whose sense of moral restraint is thereby logically (it would seem) loosened. Perhaps, when all is said, it rather depends on the kind of young man. One might be a voluptuary under any *régime*, and of a monkish chastity under none. But what is wanted in French fiction is an analysis of the process of going wrong; and as Schopenhauer and Co. are in the air just now, it is fair that they should be adapted to the novel-reader’s needs, and take their place as ‘fictive influences’ with the rest.

M. Bourget may be described as a mixture of Stendhal and Musset. From the former he gets his very subtle analysis of

motives and his admirable turn for dulness; from the latter his maudlin sensibility as regards 'la Femme.' So limited is his knowledge of life, so beggarly his theory of art, that he never can believe that people may sometimes act from a single and spontaneous emotion. But since the 'Maxims' of la Rochefoucauld it has been difficult for the literary Frenchman to believe in purely altruistic impulses; and a *fin-de-siècle* novelist who has read his philosophers finds it practically impossible. Also, at any cost, he must be of a serious turn and more or less afflicted with erotic neurosis. Moreover, he must have conned his Howells diligently, and have learned from him how every 'geste de pensée' (as Gyp has said) can be seriously dissected and formally chronicled. Add to all this a skimming acquaintance with Poe, Swinburne, Shelley and Rossetti (to quote from whom is to witch our good friends and patrons, the Anglo-maniacs) and you will have no bad idea of the equipment of a successful writer of 'high-toned' French fiction. M. Bourget has more solidity than may seem implied in all this; but he knows his public too well to take it into his confidence. He knows the exact dose of science, of psychology, of literature and of art, that its case demands; and he gives that dose. No doubt the science is sciologistic, the psychology questionable, the literature, like the art, no better than mere dilettantism. But what does it matter? Nobody knows; and if anybody did, it pays.

Like the Scotsman of the adage, M. Bourget never seems to feel at home unless he is abroad. Not long ago he gave the world a book of Italian travels which has a dreary, Pateresque kind of charm about the descriptions. Wit he eschews, and

of humour he is void; but he is a powerful thinker, and has discerned that the great charm of foreign travel is that it takes one 'loin de la femme qu'on aime.' Which of his books is the most or the least worth reading it would be hard, as it were labour lost, to say. 'Le Disciple' has a European vogue; 'Cruelle Enigme' was a great success in France; the new one has doubtless its admirers, for there is a class of mind to which there is nothing so suggestive and improving as the dulness of a clever man. The several numbers in his gallery of contemporary celebrities are marked by a subtlety of insight that makes them rather good reading. Some of his newspaper articles, too, have been highly commended by those that know: one, more especially, on the high, inspiring theme of Stays. But thus far his chief claim on our regard is that he once inspired the admirable Gyp to take up her pen and make fun of him.



## OTHER ESSAYS



## THE POETRY OF KEATS

‘Till the future dares  
Forget the past, his fate and fame shall be  
An echo and a light unto eternity.’

—SHELLEY, *Adonais*.

IN these words did Shelley prophesy an undying reputation for his dead friend and brother poet; and to-day, in the minds of all who love poetry, the name of John Keats is as securely enshrined as Shelley’s own. But the literary world of the year 1817 little imagined that there was moving in its midst a poet whose genius would one day outshine the fame of a Leigh Hunt, and even make that of a Shelley or a Byron seem less bright. Yet, had they had minds to understand, they would have felt, after reading the first sheaf of poems which was offered to the public, that in them they had the promise of a harvest of song diverse, indeed, but not less opulent than theirs.

Mr. Swinburne, in his article on Keats in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, deals rather harshly with those early poems. Raw, crude, and sometimes mawkish they undoubtedly were; but from time to time a line of transcendent beauty starts away from its baser fellows, thrilling the inward sense with delight. Several such might easily be culled from those interesting poems—poems which, at the moment of their appearance,

were not deemed worthy of any notice, favourable or unfavourable, by the critics of the day.

What Arnold calls 'the Celtic vein'—the sense of the magic and wonder of nature—is often observable in them, as, indeed, in all Keats' work. By virtue of it he penetrates deeper into the mysterious loveliness of flowers than any poet either before or since. He seems to live with their life and rejoice in it. This faculty of spiritual projection, as one may term it, reminds one of what Amiel says of himself in his 'Journal Intime'—that he could at times so completely throw himself into the vegetable life around him that he literally felt himself to be a tree or a plant. So is it with Keats. He was 'made one with Nature,' not only when his body was given to Italian earth, and his soul (as Shelley sings) had passed into the life of the world to be 'a voice in all her music, a presence felt in every herb and stone,' but also, and more especially when, at the height of his inspiration, by virtue of a supreme sympathy sinking himself into the life around him, he became for a space a portion of the loveliness of nature, and, rose-like, mingled with the roses. This intense sympathy with nature constitutes his inalienable poetic gift, for we may say with the distinguished critic and noble poet to whose memory these essays are dedicated, that poetry has two spheres of interpretation, the ethical and the natural—on the one hand, the sphere of man's thought and action, and, on the other, the sphere of the phenomena animate and inanimate—presented to our senses. Now, of these Keats leaves the former, the sphere of man's thought and action, almost unexplored. Nor can we wonder at this, for he died at the age of twenty-six,



before his mind was matured, and before he had sufficient knowledge of life. That the many-coloured ways of men were not a matter of indifference to him, however, is shown by his composition of 'Otho the Great,' a drama which contains lines that Shakespeare himself might have penned, and which, written as it was towards the close of his brief career, gave promise of better things to come. But in the sphere of the interpretation of nature he reigns supreme. Love of nature was with him a consuming passion, a fervent instinct, passing into the white heat of spiritual emotion. Unlike his great predecessor Wordsworth, it was not nature viewed in its relation to man that moved him, but nature viewed simply and solely in the light of its own loveliness.

Added, moreover, to this unique intensity of feeling for nature, he possessed, latterly at least, a power of wielding words artistically, not surpassed by Tennyson. Let any one who doubts this read his 'Ode to a Nightingale' and doubt no more. Consummate use of words and mellowness of perfect speech can go no further. For such absolute charm we must turn to the fragmentary poems, more golden than gold, of Sappho the Lesbian, to the songs of Catullus and of Burns, or to the later lyrics of Tennyson. Only in these and in the poems of Heine shall we find, wedded to flawless expression, a depth and intensity of passion which make all other passions of lesser poets seem pale. These are the *merum nectar* of the vintage of song. The 'Hymn to Aphrodite' of Sappho, the 'Acme and Septimius' of Catullus, Burns' passionate lays, the incidental songs in the 'Princess,' the odes of Keats, and the love-poems of Heine, are the supreme flowers of European lyric poetry.

Keats' second publication, 'Endymion,' a more ambitious work, was composed during the course of a summer and autumn spent by the poet in the Isle of Wight; and, from beginning to end, it breathes of the verdure and waving woodland of that delightful island. We wander on and on through a fragrant wilderness of flowers, lost in mazes of luxuriant and odorous undergrowth. Here the willow trails its delicate amber, there fresh-blown musk roses fling their sweets upon the summer; all the air is filled with the delicate scents of dewy blossoms, the sky is purely, tenderly blue, and clouds of whitest fleeciness float over us. It is an enchanted land, where comes no ruder sound than the 'moan of doves in immemorial elms and murmur of innumerable bees.' A happy sense of soothing comes over us as we read; the world and all its fret and stir is far away; we utterly forget our old sad life, or only remember it to heighten the luxury of the present. Influences benign and balmy rain on us from every side, and our foreheads are fanned to coolness by gentlest breezes of dew-laden winds.

It would take too much space to follow the meanderings of this sweet, rambling poem; the plot is too diffuse, too invertebrate, so to speak, to lend itself readily to analysis. In the first book the finest passage is probably the hymn to Pan. If ever words breathed the spirit of nature-worship and the profound charm of mere and woodland, then these do:—

'O thou, whose mighty palace-roof doth hang  
From jagged trunks, and overshadoweth  
Eternal whispers, glooms, the birth, life, death  
Of unseen flowers in heavy peacefulness

Who lovest to see the hamadryads dress  
Their ruffled locks where meeting hazels darken ;  
And through whole solemn hours dost sit and hearken  
The dreary melody of bedded reeds—  
In desolate places where dank moisture breeds  
The pipy hemlock to strange overgrowth,  
Bethinking thee how melancholy loth  
Thou wast to lose fair Syrinx—do thou now,  
    By thy love's milky brow,  
By all the trembling mazes that she ran,  
    Hear us, great Pan !'

Perhaps, however, the following lines from the Indian girl's song are the finest passage in the whole poem :—

' And as I sat, over the light blue hills  
There came a noise of revellers, the rills  
Into the wide stream came of purple hue :  
'Twas Bacchus and his crew. . . .  
Like to a moving vintage down they came,  
Crown'd with green leaves, and faces all on flame.'

That much in this truly dazzling work should have offended the narrow criticism of the day was inevitable ; that much in it is still bound to offend even the most enlightened criticism, it is worse than useless to deny. As Keats himself says in his preface to the poem, 'the reader must soon perceive in it great inexperience and immaturity, and every error denoting a feverish attempt rather than a deed accomplished.' This is true enough, and it is well to concede the fact at once. But, all deductions made, what a splendid residue of treasure remains ! It is questionable if a young poet ever put forth so much ore of poetry in one mass. Shelley wrote his 'Laon and Cythna' in friendly rivalry with Keats' 'Endymion,' but, wonderful poem as it is, it does not show the lavish opulence

of imagination displayed in the latter. Both are highly characteristic of their authors, Shelley's being inflamed with all his wild hatred of tyrants, and impelled by the passion of impetuous rhythm, Keats' rich in gorgeous imagery, full of the enjoyment of natural beauty, and moving onwards untumultuously. Perhaps it would be interesting to look at a few of the criticisms that were bestowed on 'Endymion' at its appearance. In the *Quarterly Review* for April 1818 there is a short article on 'Endymion,' written by the then editor, Gifford. This is the famous article which was said to have killed Keats by its virulence, a story utterly false, but unfortunately perpetuated by Byron's sneering verse in 'Don Juan' and Shelley's noble threnody, the 'Adonais.' As is amply proven by Lord Houghton in his Memoir of the poet, Keats was not the man to be 'snuffed out by an article.' There was, as Arnold says, plenty of flint and iron in his composition, as well as sensibility; and, besides, he had so lofty a conception of his art that the criticism of a Gifford was as nothing compared with his self-criticism. His own words will make this manifest. 'Praise or blame has but a momentary effect on the man whose love of beauty in the abstract makes him a severe critic of his own works. My own self-criticism has given me pain without comparison beyond what *Blackwood* or the *Quarterly* could possibly inflict.' This is evidently not the sort of man to be killed by a review. Some of Gifford's strictures ran as follows:—

'Mr. Keats,' he says, 'is a disciple of the new school of what has been called "Cockney poetry," which may be defined to consist of the most incongruous ideas in the most uncouth

language. This author is a copyist of Mr. Leigh Hunt, but he is more unintelligible, almost as rugged, twice as diffuse, and ten times more absurd than his prototype . . . ' and so on, and so on. A few of his criticisms are just enough, as, for example, when he finds fault with some words of Keats' own coinage, such as 'gordianed,' 'refreshfully,' etc.

Let us now turn to Keats' second and third volumes of verse. In them are contained those poems which will secure him a place among the greatest English poets—'Lamia,' 'The Eve of St. Agnes,' 'Isabella, or the Pot of Basil,' 'Hyperion' and the 'Odes.' These are so many clear titles to a place among the highest on the golden scroll.

In 'Lamia' we can trace a decided advance in style. From first to last there is no faltering nor weakness. All is supremely ordered, and the words are chosen with an unerring instinct. Once only, perhaps, there is a touch of something like vulgarity. That luckless line and a half

'There is not such a *treat* among them all . . .  
As a *real* woman.'

make one shudder and involuntarily remember that Keats—a Greek in soul if ever there was one—was, after all, nurtured in Cockneydom. What are often mentioned as Cockneyisms in Keats' rhymes can only be so regarded by Scotsmen or by those who trust to their eyes rather than to their ears. There is no real objection to such rhymes as 'fire' and 'tiar,' 'morn' and 'dawn,' 'higher' and 'Thalia.' To English ears there is an absolute similarity of sound between the first two words, and an almost absolute similarity between the two latter pairs. And

surely there is no harm in pushing the principle of rhyme to the verge of assonance.

In 'Lamia' there are touches of sprightly cleverness which are the more delightful that they are somewhat rare in this great artist's work,—such lines as

' Not one hour old, yet of sciential brain  
To unperplex bliss from its neighbour pain ; . . .  
As tho' in Cupid's college she had spent  
Sweet days, a lovely graduate still unshent,  
And kept his rosy terms in idle languishment.'

(Is it lawful to ask here whether Tennyson derived his 'Sweet girl graduates in their golden hair' from this source?). And again,

' Philosophy will clip an angel's wings.'

The light and airy manner is one not often affected by Keats, and he is not always successful in it. Witness, for example, the 'Cap and Bells.' His genius is essentially serious and sensuous. Elegant trifling is not in his way. Neither has he that ethereal quality which makes the poems of Shelley so lovely and yet so intangible. The beauty of the material world is his sphere, not the spiritual dreamland of aspiration; yet he is not always very far from it either. In such a poem, for example, as 'La Belle Dame sans Merci,' we leave the world of concrete things and pass into the realm of fairy romance. The Celtic element is here uppermost. This last-named poem is one of the most perfect things of the poet, but it is too short to be maimed by quotation. Two poems by other poets may fitly be compared with it,—the 'Christabel' of Coleridge, and the 'Rose-Mary' of Rossetti. In all these,

the Celtic sense of wizardry and mystery in nature makes itself felt. They are, so to speak, haunted, and leave an eerie, weird impression on the mind.

'Hyperion' is of all Keats' poems the greatest and the grandest. It is only a fragment, but, like the fragments of the 'marble fairness of old Greece,' excels all second-rate completion whatsoever. Here we listen to the large utterance of the early gods, who had been silent since the days of Æschylus. How Keats, who knew the genius of the Greeks only through Latin and English, should have seized the spirit of old Hellenic legend with such majestic result, will remain an unsolved problem for ever. Such accents had not sounded in human ears before or since Prometheus defied Zeus on Caucasus. Hesiod, in his description of the battle between the Titans and Zeus, has a passage of magnificent power and splendour; and he has, moreover, the 'surge and thunder' of the hexameter at his command. But yet it may be doubted whether he produces so sonorous an effect as Keats. Æschylus, and Æschylus alone, can match the English poet.

## THE POETRY OF MR. SWINBURNE

MR. SWINBURNE is now a poet of mature years, and has doubtless laid aside many of youth's follies, for the fancies and fiery imaginings of youth have ceased, or all but ceased, to goad his genius to the utterance of the lyric cry. The days of 'Poems and Ballads' (first series) are long since over, and nothing now proceeds from his pen more stirring than an occasional onslaught on a czar or other public character. *Quantum mutatus!* What plague is it that so often seems to seize our English men of letters, and drive them headlong from the pleasant fields of literature down into the abyss of politics or the seething whirlpool of socialistic propagandism? Mark a William Morris and marvel at the sight! It is a far cry from the earthly paradise of romance to the earthly paradise of social democracy, and yet this exuberant artist has lapsed from the one into the other. Some, no doubt, will rejoice at it as a sign of the helpful energy of the man; others will regret that all Pan's labour in the making of a poet should be rendered vain. Why should the finest-tempered minds wantonly attack the rugged problems of politics or sociology, and be laughed at by the coarser spirits whom they oppose, pitied by those whom they seek to aid, and bewailed by the



children of art as lost leaders and infatuate? Let them rather dwell in a land of clear colours and stories, under the warm heaven of art's imminent wings, and not stray beyond these pleasant bounds.

Mr. Swinburne was once a denizen of this bright and happy country, in the days when the beauty of women and the multitudinous laughter of ocean were more to him than the cursing of many czars, more even than a babe's pink toes—days when the daughters of dreams and of stories were desirable and adored, and when the wind's feet shone along the sea. Now the inevitable back-sweep of the pendulum has come, as it came to the French poet Racine, who lived to renounce the stage and all its works, and wrote second-class hymns instead, and to the Russian novelist Tolstoï, who now regards his former brilliant achievements in the sphere of fiction as anathema, and sums up his theory of life and literature in that woeful work, the 'Kreutzer Sonata.' Such is the irony of fate.

Unlike other poets, Mr. Swinburne gave the world his best first. With the exception of one or two stray pieces here and there in later works, none of his poems approach the perfection and dazzling audacity of those early ones,—those that came to him dreaming in class-time. Since Keats put forth his 'Endymion' volume, what young poet has produced such firstlings of his genius? Think of the weak airy trash that preceded the masterpieces of the late Laureate, and then compare them with the poems of Mr. Swinburne that leapt forth in faultless panoply of artistic form from the glowing furnace of his adolescent imagination. Compare, for example, the

clear outline of 'Faustine' with the vapid vagueness of 'Lilian.' The former is, indeed, stamped in Roman gold; the latter fades away in a dreamland of drivel.

With Mr. Swinburne a new spirit came over English poetry. What that spirit is, whence it came, and what it accomplished, it is the purpose of this paper to attempt to tell. To the poetry of revolt, as typified by Byron, had succeeded the poetry of acquiescence, as typified by Wordsworth, and in a later day by Tennyson. People had grown accustomed to the thought that, after all, Byron's revolt against the constitution of things had been half impious, half unreal, and that perhaps the world, if not '*le meilleur des mondes possible*,' was at least a very tolerable place; that if Christianity was not exactly true in the narrower sense of the term, still enough remained to give dignity to life and certitude to conduct; that a belief in hell was to be discouraged, and a belief in heaven promoted, and that generally a comfortable *bourgeois* theory of existence was the thing to be cultivated. Into the midst of this pleasant state of things down came Mr. Swinburne's book of 'Poems and Ballads' like a bolt from the blue, and fluttered all the dovescots of contemporary criticism. Here, in Protestant church-going England, a bud of questionable shape and odour had burst into strange and sinister blossom. The seven deadly sins were stalking naked and not ashamed through our streets, and, in the emphatic words of a popular preacher, the land was witnessing the recrudescence of stark paganism. Such startling boldness of diction had not fallen on English ears since the days of Marlowe. There was something jaunty and provocative, too, about some of those poems that seemed

almost to challenge the censor. And a most vindictive one they found in the person of Mr. Robert Buchanan, who felt it incumbent on him to chastise the new school of what he termed 'fleshly poetry' by assailing, not so much Mr. Swinburne, however, as Rossetti, whom he considered the primal offender. But little did he dream of the vengeance which was to overtake him. In a pamphlet entitled 'Under the Microscope,' which is a little masterpiece of vituperative criticism, Mr. Buchanan is, so to speak, put in the mortar of the poet's wrath, and there pestled and pommelled to a powder. Not since Milton's flaying of Salmasius had anything so drastic and severe been done. When the *genus irritabile* is thoroughly aroused, it can sting to some purpose.

But what had caused all the pother about Mr. Swinburne's book? A decadent had appeared in England. The spirit which had inspired writers like Théophile Gautier and Charles Baudelaire had shown itself in the literature of a land where, since the avowed libertinage of the Restoration times, the written speech of men had been on the whole decent and decorous, and in which the worship of beauty had mainly been conspicuous by its absence. Keats is a noteworthy exception in the latter particular, but in him this worship is a joyous and innocent emotion. He revels and luxuriates in the loveliness of nature, and leaves all other ideals aside,—seems, indeed, unconscious of them. Not so with the decadents. They have felt the import of other aspects of life besides the worship of beauty, and at the same time, perceiving on what shaky foundations much that is called morality rests, they have revolted against the dictates of the common conscience

and are exasperated with themselves and others. There is always a tinge of bitterness in the spirit of decadents. They are angels who have fallen from what they consider a fool's paradise, and yet are sad and disconsolate. They feel that they are regarded as outcasts, and take their revenge by mocking the commonplace notions on art and morality accepted by the *bourgeois* and the Philistine. This spirit of rebellion against the average feeling of one's countrymen is one which Mr. Swinburne had no doubt largely derived from his French inspirers. The school of the 'Parnassiens' was marked by an unconventional attitude with regard to morals. But if reverence for Mrs. Grundy was at a low figure, reverence for Art was apotheosed into a religion whose shibboleth was 'Art for Art's sake.' Perfect, flawless execution was demanded with a rigour which even in France was unheard of before, and consummate workmanship was the only passport for poems whose subject-matter might be as slight and as fantastic as the writer chose. No vague spiritualism, no vapid sentiment, no misty idealism was allowed. Poems were to have the hard outline of carved ivory and the splendour of chased gold. They were to resemble gems, jewels and statues,—miracles of craftsman's art. All metres and forms were permitted, but severe and rigorous adherence to the mould chosen was prescribed. There was to be no looseness of phrase, no faltering of rhyme or rhythm. A poem should be a perfect chrysolite. Such stringent limitations of the poetic art had never been known in England, where a severe sense of the beauty of form was never so common as a love of warm and glowing sentiment. The

theme, therefore, of such artist-poets was uncongenial to English minds. Statues, jewels, and above all, the human body, and that not treated with a reverent and draped idealism, but nakedly and plastically, were distasteful subjects to the reading classes of this country.

Imagine, then, the effect of the appearance of a poet who joined to the artistic sense of form, which he had learnt from the French and from the Greeks, a vehemence and earnestness of feeling Semitic in their intensity, and dedicated to themes of a decadent order!—an Ovid writing ‘Amores’ with the fervour of a Jeremiah! No such phenomenon had appeared on the horizon of English letters. Separately, each tendency (Ovid’s and Jeremiah’s) had been developed to the full. What was novel was the combination. One might have thought that a sense of humour would have kept these seemingly disparate elements asunder, but here the syncope was so dashing and complete that poor humour was literally knocked into nothingness by the shock. Wit there is in sparkling plenty in these poems. ‘Dolores’ is perhaps one of the wittiest poems in any language, if we can allow the title of witty to what is not necessarily amusing or ludicrous. The only other poem that can be put beside it is Byron’s ‘Don Juan’; the wit in that poem is infinitely less refined and artistic than the wit in ‘Dolores,’ though, doubtless, it is more generally intelligible. The mention of ‘Dolores’ brings one to the consideration of the ‘Trilogy’ (for such it may be called), of which that poem forms the opening drama, and the ‘Garden of Proserpine’ and ‘Hesperia’ the sequel. They must be read in the above order to be understood and appreciated; for they then form an

allegory of a soul, a sinful soul, passing through the stages of revolt, apathy and regeneration. 'Dolores' is the poetic presentment of the spirit of desire, the lust of the flesh, the *φρόνημα σαρκός*. She is the witching strange woman that ensnares the soul of youth, and holds youth spellbound by the lure of her deadly love. And the victim, in mocking soliloquy, upbraids the fair temptress for her cruelty, deaf as the fire, her mouth like a venomous flower, her beautiful passionate body that never has ached with a heart; and recounts in a torrent of anapæsts all her sins of old times, when her will stung the world into strife, and when Rome lay red from her rods:—

'When, with flame all round him aspirant,  
 Stood flushed as a harp-player stands  
 The implacable beautiful tyrant  
 Rose-crowned, having death in his hands;  
 And a sound as the sound of loud water  
 Smote far through the flight of the fires,  
 And mixed with the lightning of slaughter  
 A thunder of lyres.'

But her limbs are as melodies yet, and, though bitter the core, the rind is still sweet, and her kisses still rain on the lips and the limbs of her lovers. It may be that the old world is broken; that old poets outsing and outlove us; that a goddess new-born has come out of Dindymus,—a mother, a mortal, a maiden; that the high places of Dolores have been wasted with fire; that our loves and our longings are twain. But they, too, the gods and the priests that are pure, shall pass, while she shall live until evil be slain. After death, who knows, perhaps the joys of her shall be seventy times seven.

To this feverish dithyramb in praise of desire succeeds the listless quiet of the 'Garden of Proserpine,' where all trouble seems dead winds' and spent waves' riot. The pleasure-seeker is now tired of tears and laughter, and of everything but sleep. He is lying beside pale beds of blowing rushes and poppy-flowers whereout Proserpine is crushing for dead men deadly wine. Here she awaits all men born, gathering all things mortal with cold immortal hands, and hither come all withered loves, all things disastrous, all red strays of ruined springs. Only death and the deep joy of death remain:—

'From too much love of living,  
From hope and fear set free,  
We thank with brief thanksgiving  
Whatever gods may be,  
That no life lives for ever,  
That dead men rise up never,  
That even the weariest river  
Winds somewhere safe to sea.'

The sun shines not here by day nor the moon by night, and naught remains in this forgotten and forgetful land but sleep eternal in an eternal darkness:—

'Securos latices et longa oblivia potant.'

Suddenly, as with the jubilant acclaim of all the clarions of joy, Hesperia, the spirit of health and hope, springs forth on the rapid onrush of triumphant anapæsts—Hesperia, the girl beloved in early youth, who had been cast aside for the bitter delights of Dolores, our Lady of Pain, and whose radiant image

now rises in the poet's soul as a day-spring from on high.  
 'Come,' he cries—

'Out of the golden remote wild west, where the sea without shore is  
 Full of the sunset, and sad, if at all, with the fulness of joy:

From the bountiful infinite west, from the happy memorial places,  
 Full of the stately repose and the lordly delight of the dead,  
 Where the fortunate islands are lit with the light of ineffable faces,  
 And the sound of a sea without wind is about them, and sunset is red!

Come back to redeem and release me from love that recalls and represses,  
 That cleaves to my flesh as a flame till the serpent has eaten her fill;  
 From the bitter delights of the dark and the fervent and furtive caresses  
 That murder the youth in a man or ever his heart have its will.'

Forth they ride into the wild night together, and gallop for  
 dear life with unslackening rein, till the dawn shall have risen  
 and all the hours of the darkness shall have sunk far behind  
 them:—

'O love, shall we win at the last?'

As we have said, these poems form a trilogy. First, the  
 frenzied revolt, the delirious pleasure-hunt, the relapses and  
 reluctances of desire, the bitter mockeries, all the *γλυκύπικρον*  
 of passion; and then the sad and sated soul, wearily quiescent  
 in the chill garden of the dead, half-forgetful of the past and  
 wholly indifferent to the future, so it be not life, and sick of  
 everything but slumber; and lastly, the quickening new birth,  
 and the breathless race on the coursers of the morning towards  
 the far-seen goal of triumph and joy. In the language of  
 religion, we might call this an allegory of a soul passing from  
 the death of sin to the life of righteousness; and certainly the



parallel between these three poems and, say, the chapters in Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, entitled 'The Everlasting Nay,' 'The Centre of Indifference' and 'The Everlasting Yea,' is sufficiently striking. But the difference, too, is striking. The love of a woman is the means of salvation in the former case, the love of God in the latter. But perhaps the love of a woman is, by the poet, regarded as leading to the love of God. Rescue from death and misery is, at any rate, the key-note of both. Perhaps we may say that the same natural phenomenon is regarded from the different points of view of the poet and the moralist. Mr. Swinburne's conception is more coloured, more human, more beautiful; Carlyle's is made of sterner stuff, is more sublime, and has deeper depths of sorrow and higher heights of beatitude and wonder, but lacks charm and loveliness. Carlyle's solution of the problem of life is Pauline and uncompromising; Mr. Swinburne's is tentative, and, though to the full as earnest, is less severely serious; Greek thought and mediæval chivalry have moulded too profoundly the mind of the soliloquist of the trilogy for him to be able to accept the dictum, 'Love not pleasure, love God.' He finds that the way of salvation and of well-doing for him lies in the love of a maiden, whom he had loved long since, and lost awhile.

Of perfect melody of metre no better example could be found in the poet's work than that sweet inconsequent song called 'A Match':—

'If love were what the rose is,  
And I were like the leaf.' . . .

Those who insist on meaning in poetry may feel aggrieved at

the slenderness of the amount here, but those whose ears are attuned to sweet music, and who can appreciate airy nothings light as gossamer in summer afternoons, will delight in it, and hear it singing pleasantly in their inward ear like remembered echoes of delicate harmony. This poem, and also the 'Dedication' to Mr. Burne-Jones at the end of the volume, are, perhaps, the most musical things written by this most musical of poets. Take the verse:—

'In a land of clear colours and stories,  
In a region of shadowless hours,  
Where earth has a garment of glories,  
And a murmur of musical flowers;  
In woods where the spring half uncovers  
The flush of her amorous face,  
By the waters that listen for lovers,  
For these is there place?'

Do the words not seem to sing as they go? Airs rise unbidden in the brain, and join themselves to the tinkling rhymes and the delicate ripple of the rhythm.

Full of fancy and suggestion is the bright little lyric called an 'Interlude.' Something of the Celtic wizardry of nature, the 'pathetic fallacy' of sentient flowers and plants, is felt in the lines:—

'And the flag-flowers lightened with laughter,  
And the meadow-sweet shook with love.'

Not altogether unlike are the lines in Tennyson's 'Maud':—

'And the larkspur whispered, "I hear! I hear!"  
And the lily whispered, "I wait!"'

What a picture in the lines:—

'I waited to watch you linger  
With foot drawn back from the dew'!

From the rich casket of jewels which this first volume forms, it is almost impossible to select individual gems for special admiration. Scarcely one poem fails to reach the highest pitch of the peculiar excellence of its kind. As imitations of classical metre, what could excel 'Hendecasyllables' or 'Sapphics'? And, as solemn threnodies, can any poems in English approach the 'Laus Veneris,' the 'Triumph of Time,' or the 'Hymn to Proserpine'? The last mentioned is a poem of special power and interest. It represents the feelings of a priest of Proserpine on the proclamation in Rome of the Christian faith:—

'I have lived long enough, having seen one thing,—that love hath an end.' . . .

To this servant of a failing faith the new rule of Christ seems cold and gloomy. The world has grown grey from the breath of the pale Galilean. To him, as to Julian, the religion of the Cross seems folly, and the mother of love more divine than the maiden-mother of Jesus:—

'Yea, once we had sight of another, but now she is queen, say these;  
Not as thine, not as thine, was our mother, a blossom of flowering seas;  
Clothed round with the world's desire as with raiment, and fair as the  
foam,

And fleetier than kindled fire, and a goddess and mother of Rome.

For thine came pale and a maiden and sister to sorrow; but ours,

Her deep hair heavily laden with odour and colour of flowers,

White rose of the rose-white water, a silver splendour, a flame,

Bent down unto us that besought her, and earth grew sweet with her  
name.

For thine came weeping, a slave among slaves, and rejected; but she

Came flushed from the full-flushed wave, and imperial, her foot on the sea;

And the wonderful waters knew her, the winds and the viewless ways,

And the roses grew rosier, and bluer the sea-blue streams of the bays.'

Mr. Swinburne is perhaps at his greatest when he sings of the sea. Of all English poets he loves most sincerely the ever-shifting life of winds and tides. His is no second-hand acquaintance, but a thoroughly genuine delight in the 'great sweet mother,—mother and lover of men,—the sea.' He has all the swimmer's healthy joy in breasting the billows, in cleaving the keen clear water with exultant limbs. (It is said that the poet is a fine and fearless swimmer, and will often venture farther from shore than caution would countenance.) Countless examples could be found in his poems where he speaks of the manifold ways of the sea. 'Tristram of Lyonesse' is one long pæan in praise of ocean, and again and again he shows an intimate and exquisite acquaintance with its moods and changes. 'By the North Sea' is a complete study in sea-effects, and 'Songs of the Spring Tides' a symphony in wave-music. Compared with the work of all other English poets (and this is striking when one remembers that Britannia is said to rule the waves, and that British poets have sung with all a landsman's enthusiasm of a 'life on the ocean wave'—of 'the sea, the sea, the open sea, the fresh, the blue, the ever free'), Mr. Swinburne's sea-poems are immeasurably superior in real love of his subject and in truthful accuracy of treatment. Byron deals largely with the sea, but either purely decoratively or else in wild and sombre symbolism of his own soul. He does not love it for itself; and indeed Byron, a poet deficient in eye and ear, never loved nature for itself, and other English poets have strangely neglected the sea. Tennyson has many references to it, but almost always in subordination to man and his interests. Keats loved the land, and was alien to the sea. Mr.

Swinburne loves the sea with a love almost passing the love of women. Like Victor Hugo's Gilliatt on the lonely reef, he is familiar with all its subtle caprices. (It may be said, in passing, that Victor Hugo is the great poetic authority on the sea in French.) The life of sea-winds, and of all things rich and strange that live and move beneath the waves, has a profound charm for him. The 'rose-red sea-weed that mocks the rose,' the glowing samphire, and the tiniest ocean-blooms that struggle to exist among the shelves and crannies of the rocks,—none of these are too lowly to adorn his verse. For all effects of sky and sea and breeze he has an observant and accurate eye. We can fancy him standing by the hour on some lone headland of Northumberland, watching with rapt and earnest attention the breakers thundering shoreward and the wild sea-mews beating to windward with pinions that dip and glide, and then returning to write with a mind intoxicated with fresh air and brine:—

‘O strong north-easter,  
Sea-king, land-waster!’

Or again we can picture him, on a perfectly warm day in summer, lazily swimming about in a clear rock-bound pool, with eye cast ever and anon over

‘Its wild-weed forest of crimson, of russet, and olive, and gold!’

Space forbids me to do more than give hints of this, one of the master-currents of Mr. Swinburne's genius. All his works have breaths of the sea-wind and odours of the brine in them, and the music of billows beating on rocky forelands. In ‘Atalanta,’ that beautiful *tour de force* of a Græco-Eng-

lish tragedy, we have splendid passages about the sea. Lines like—

‘Where the thundering Bosphorus answers  
The thunder of Pontic seas,’

have the sound of the storm in their harmony.

In the dialogue between Pan and Thalassius, it is Thalassius that has the last words:—

‘Thine  
All secrets of growth and of birth are,  
All glories of flower and of tree,  
Wheresoever the wonders of earth are ;  
The words of the spell of the sea—  
Mine.’

Might one here venture to express the hope that if Tennyson is not to be known to history as the last of the Laureates—and yet perhaps it were better so—the choice may fall upon Mr. Swinburne (if he care for the honour) as the living English poet most worthy of the office?

## THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF SOLOMON MAIMON

It must have been extremely unpleasant to be a Polish Jew in the eighteenth century. This is the conclusion to which one inevitably comes after reading the opening chapters of the remarkable autobiography of Solomon Maimon: for to be a Polish Jew at that time apparently meant that one was exposed to every form of oppression and annoyance that human malice could devise or human tyranny inflict. The dirtiest Christian unchanged could, with confidence of immunity, lift up his heel against the unhappy descendants of those who crucified Jesus. In fact, it was rather a meritorious thing to do than otherwise, for it implied a zeal for the true faith; and profitable too, for it doubtless secured the kicker a front seat in Paradise. Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice was much of that way of thinking, and spat gaily on the Jewish gaberdines that trailed on the Rialto. All through the Middle Ages, in fact, the poor Beni-Israel had a 'bad time of it.' To have their back teeth extracted, or to be stretched on a gridiron with a slow fire beneath, until they consented to hand over their spare cash to the ferocious and impecunious baron, was, as we know from *Ivanhoe*, quite a familiar incident in their chequered lives.

And still they expiate the cruel fanaticism of those who shouted 'Crucify him! crucify him!' But to the work before us.

Solomon Maimon was a Jewish rabbi born in Poland towards the close of last century. Circumstances over which he at all times seems to have had a very ineffectual control sent him wandering through Germany in quest of enlightenment and of the means of subsistence. He seems to have obtained much larger supplies of the former than of the latter, and never to have been really comfortably settled for more than a year or two at a time. Something always occurred which sent him forth once more a pilgrim on the face of the earth, and reduced him to utter want and destitution.

Like many autobiographers, Maimon gives an account of his grandfather, who seems to have been an easy-going, thriftless unfortunate, generally living on the debatable land between *sœva paupertas* and utter *egestas*. Bullied by noble lords and their brutal stewards or *arendants*, and driven from farm to farm, he eked out a precarious and hand-to-mouth existence in a way which fully entitled him to the *sobriquet* of the 'poorest rich man alive,' given him by his grandson and biographer. As *pontifex*, or bridge-mender, the poor Jewish farmer was exposed to the penalty of a severe flogging if a bridge over a swamp broke down whilst some noble and his train were passing over. Maimon gives a ludicrous picture of his grandfather's terror on such occasions. He and his whole household, warned by an outpost whose duty it was to give notice of such calamities, used to take to the woods and remain there till the irate cavalcade had swept by. Once Solomon's father, then a



little child, was caught by an angry prince and his courtiers, and, in the absence of the real culprit, was then and there forced to drink a huge pail of water, from the effects of which his constitution never recovered. But of all the misfortunes that overtook grandpapa Maimon, the most terrible was the accusation of murder brought against him through the agency of the 'popa,' or village priest, who had a grudge against him on account of a beer-bill which he (the 'popa') had never 'squared.' *Odisse quem laeseris* was clearly as true in last-century Poland as in imperial Rome. This time the unfortunate man was put to the torture as a means of wringing from him the confession of a murder which he had never committed, and though his innocence was at length proved, and the 'popa's' guilt made manifest, the latter still retained his popedom. In commemoration of this happy escape Maimon *grandpère* composed a poem, an *épopée*, in which the whole event was narrated and the goodness of God sung. This poem became the family *epos*, and was chanted on every anniversary of the release from prison, just as the Book of Esther is sung at the festival of Haman. Maimon mentions in connection with this story a cruel superstition which still obtains in Russia and in the East generally, namely, that Jews desire to spill the blood of a Christian child on the occasion of the Passover. If a child was found dead in the neighbourhood of a Jewish community, an indiscriminate massacre of the Jews generally followed.

The first authentic glimpse (as Carlyle would have said) which we get of Solomon Maimon, the philosopher, is when he is a little boy clothed in damask, and beset with metaphysical

difficulties about God, and receiving instruction in the Scriptures and the Talmud. 'On one occasion,' he writes, 'my father quoted the passage from the Talmud where it is said: "Jacob and Esau divided between them all the blessings of the world. Esau chose the blessings of this life, Jacob, on the contrary, those of the future life; and, since we are descended from Jacob, we must give up all claim to temporal blessings." On this I said with indignation, "Jacob should not have been a fool, and he should rather have chosen the blessings of this world." Unfortunately I got for answer, "You ungodly rascal!" and a box on the ear.'

The person who must have bulked most largely in the eyes of the youthful Maimon was the Prince Radzivil. This potentate seems to have been one of the worst of that class of do-nothing sovereigns who condescend to wear the crown of a tax-paying community. Fantastic, foolish, brutal, and with no idea in his head beyond his own amusements, one wonders he was not shot from behind a hedge or blown up with dynamite (if that explosive existed in those days) instead of, so to speak, living to die in his bed. One day this mighty person, accompanied by his daughters, arrived on a hunting expedition at the house of Solomon's father. The little fellow, hiding behind the stove, peered out at the princesses in their glorious garments, and exclaimed, 'how beautiful!' His father, overhearing him, whispered in his ear, 'Little fool, in the other world the *dukssel* (princess) will kindle the *pezsure* (stove) for us.'

At a very early age he began the study of the Talmud, and seems to have found it a dry business; and, indeed, the elaboration of rabbinical conceits cannot have been the most stimu-

lating mental *pabulum*. Occasionally the gloom of ceremonial discussions is relieved, however, by funny little arguments on such exciting themes, for example, as 'How many white hairs may a red cow have and yet remain a red cow?' and also 'Whether a louse or a flea may be killed on the Sabbath?'—the first being allowed, while the second is a deadly sin.

About this time, too, he began the study of astronomy. His custom was to steal out of his grandmother's bed, where (*O sancta simplicitas!*) his office was to keep the old lady warm, and sit down by the fire with a volume of astronomy and read far on into the night. At last the time came for Solomon, as it comes to all boys, to go to school. But one may venture to assert that seldom has anybody met with a dominie, outside the pale of fiction, of more dreadful and appalling character than Jossel, the 'scourge of God,' who gave instruction in the Hebrew tongue to those unfortunate youngsters who came under his ferule. It was apparently a way with this festive and gruesome brute to tear off his pupils' ears and beat out their eyes (*sic*),—at least so stands the accusation in the English translation of the autobiography; but one hopes that either the learned translator, Dr. Clark Murray, has here slightly misrepresented his original, or that Maimon is exaggerating. After all, to tear off ears is not so easy a thing to do. But he was a determined fellow, this 'scourge of God,' and knew how to deal with parents,—an important branch of a schoolmaster's profession. When the papas and mammas of some over-zealously flogged little urchin came to complain to Jossel, he would beat them away with sticks and hurl stones or any other handy missile at them. Altogether a strong man

this 'scourge of God' (again to put it in Carlyle's manner). By the way, how the philosopher of Craigenputtock would have chuckled over Jossel's sturdy ways of showing that might was right!

In school-time the usual position for the Jewish master to take was to squat on a table, holding between his knees a bowl in which he pounded tobacco into snuff with a huge pestle like the club of Hercules. One is glad to learn that the youthful Solomon was finally rescued from the sway of Jossel and sent to another school. A journey home for the holidays was the occasion of a trifling sprain to his foot, which was cured in the queerest manner imaginable. A dog was killed, and the cramped foot thrust into the warm carcass. The remedy may not be recognised by the faculty, but in this case, at any rate, it was successful.

About this time Solomon's father got into difficulties with an *arendant* of Prince Radzivil's called Herr Schachna, as a result of which he was evicted from his farm and had to betake himself like his grand progenitor to a new country. But with that faculty for adapting themselves to circumstances, which characterises the race, they soon settled down quietly and began their fortunes afresh. Solomon was sent to another school, and the study of the Talmud was continued. The boy was now only eleven years old or nearly, and already the tender passion had made itself felt in his youthful soul. The manner of its arousing was decidedly unconventional and rather charming. He had been fascinated by the prettiness of his mother's maidservant, and had even dared (in spite of rigorous training) to cast looks of admiration on her. One day his

mother and her maid went to the river to bathe; and little Solomon crept Actæon-like to a sheltered nook whence, unseen, he could see them. He goes on to tell us that the sight of the naked loveliness of the girl roused such a flutter in his heart that he did not recover his composure for a long time—not, indeed, until he married!

This brings us to the most *piquant* episode in Solomon's life, viz. his marriage. This event took place (lift hands of horror, ye prisco-malthusians) in his eleventh year! Were this fact not stated in the most precise and unenigmatical terms, one might have doubted the possibility of such a thing. But there it stands in black and white in chapter XI. True, he goes on to say in his quaintly *naïf* way, that at that age he was ignorant of the 'essential duties of marriage,' and regarded his wife with mixed feelings of admiration and terror. Yet he must have conquered these weak feelings pretty soon, for he begat a son in his fourteenth year! But this is anticipating. Before marriage, he had the choice of two wives offered him, and his father managed skilfully to extract large sums of money from both families; for in Poland it would seem that, contrary to the Homeric custom, wives bought their husbands. Unfortunately, along with his wife he also got a mother-in-law who made his life a burden to him. This virago used literally to beat her youthful son-in-law with a stick. But one night he had his revenge, for what did he do but steal under his mother-in-law's bed; then, feigning the tone of his defunct mother, he groaned aloud: 'O Rissia, Rissia, you ungodly woman, why do you treat my beloved son so ill? If you do not mend your ways, your end is near and you will be

damned to all eternity.' Then he crept out and pinched the poor old lady horribly. Thereafter she treated him much better.

The next few chapters contain an account of his untiring efforts after self-culture. Alas, he had not much with which to satisfy his intellectual cravings. The Cabbala must make but a sorry substitute for the classics and mathematics. And so misleading, too, in some of its teaching! By saying certain prayers and performing certain rites, he was told that he would become invisible. Poor Solomon tried the spell and hurried to the Academy, where he gave one of his comrades a vigorous box on the ear, thinking he was safe from retaliation. But a smart blow in return quite undeceived him, and sowed the seeds of religious scepticism in his mind. This scepticism went on broadening and deepening, till at length Maimon, the Jewish rabbi, stood forth as Maimon the philosopher, the friend of Mendelssohn and the student of Kant. But he had to traverse much bewildering folly before his way became clear. He at one time joined himself to a sect of neo-pietists or *Chasidim* (a sort of Jewish 'shakers') who aimed at giving a more emotional turn to their hereditary religion. Maimon sojourned in their tents for some time, but at last their excesses revolted him. One tale he recounts of them is too amusing to be omitted. At one of the secret meetings of these pious folk, which was held in the house of the Superior, it was announced to the assembled company that the wife of one of their number had just presented her husband with a daughter. Whereupon the Superior exclaimed, 'A girl! he ought to be whipped!' And then and there the unfortunate

parent was flung down on the floor and most unmercifully whipped by the brethren, after which the Superior called them to prayer with the words 'Now brethren, serve the Lord with gladness.' This was the last straw to Maimon's wavering allegiance, and he shook from off his shoes the dust of those devout conventiclers.

From chapter XXI. onwards, we find poor Maimon a wanderer on the face of the earth, as all his fathers, were. The *res angusta* of the Maimon household had driven him to bethink himself of some useful profession, and he chose medicine. Königsberg in Prussia was the first place he selected as an *alma mater*, but instead of fostering care he received only harsh treatment of a step-motherly kind. Stettin was his next halting place, and then Frankfurt, which city he reached after enduring manifold afflictions. At length he reached Berlin. To his horror and surprise he learned that he would not be allowed to stay there, as the Jewish authorities of the place had heard that he intended to publish a commentary of perhaps doubtful orthodoxy on a book called the *Moreh Nebhochim*, a work of the great Jewish rabbi Maimonides. Cast out of Berlin, he wandered off he knew not whither. On the high road he fell in with a Jewish beggar, who tried to teach Maimon his trade, but Maimon asserts that he never completely mastered it. In the town of Posen he called on the chief rabbi, who received him very kindly, and procured him board and lodging in the house of a friend. Poor Solomon recounts with a thrill of retrospective emotion his sensations when shown the nice clean bed on which he was to sleep. Such a luxury had long ceased to be for *him*. On the

death of this benefactor, Maimon got the place of private tutor in a wealthy Jewish household, where he was so much esteemed that, as Maimon says in quaintly un-rabbinical phrase, 'they wanted to make me a prophet *malgré moi*.'

Two incidents, mentioned in this connection, are worth relating, and Maimon shall speak for himself.

'One day when the cook in a certain Jewish house was preparing a carp for the Sabbath, the fish seemed to utter a sound. This threw everybody into a panic. A rabbi was asked what should be done with this dumb fish that had ventured to speak. Under the superstitious idea that the carp was possessed with a spirit, the rabbi enjoined that it should be wrapped in a linen cloth and buried with pomp. Now in the house where I lived this awe-inspiring event became the subject of conversation. Having by this time emancipated myself pretty thoroughly from superstitions of this sort by diligent study of the *Moreh Nebhochim*, I laughed heartily over the story, and said that if instead of burying the carp they had sent it to me, I should have tried how such an inspired carp would taste. This *bon mot* became known. The learned men fell into a passion about it, denounced me as a heretic, and sought to persecute me in every way. But the respect entertained for me in the house where I was tutor made all their efforts fruitless. As I found myself in this way safe, and the spirit of fanaticism, instead of deterring me, rather spurred me on to further reflection, I began to push matters a little further, frequently slept through the time of prayer, went seldom to the synagogue, and so on. At last the measure of my sins became so full, that nothing could secure me any longer from persecution.



‘At the entrance to the Common Hall in Posen there has been, no one knows for how long, a stag-horn fixed into the wall. The Jews are unanimously of the conviction that any one who touches this horn is sure to die on the spot; and they relate a multitude of instances in proof. This would not go down with me at all, and I made fun of it. So one day when I was passing the stag-horn with some other Jews, I said to them, ‘You Posen fools, do you think that any one who touches this horn must die on the spot? See, I dare to touch it!’ Horror-struck they expected my death on the spot; but as nothing happened, their anxiety for me was converted into hatred. They looked on me as one who had profaned the sanctuary.’

The desire of new knowledge again sent Maimon off on his travels, and he started for Berlin. Here he recommended himself to the philosopher Mendelssohn by a dissertation which he wrote on the thirteen articles of faith laid down by Maimonides. Having previously read Wolff’s ‘Metaphysics,’ which he had picked up by chance, he displayed his philosophical acumen by combating their ontology. About this period he read Locke and Spinoza, whose writings permanently modified the course of his philosophical speculations. For *belles lettres* he till then had had all the philosopher’s disregard. But one day Longinus’ ‘Treatise on the Sublime’ fell into his hands, and he was much impressed by passages there cited from Homer and Sappho. Ossian, too, in a German translation aroused his utmost admiration. (What the pompous platitudes of the worthy M’Pherson sounded like in German, only those who know the capacities of the German tongue in that direction can imagine.) Mendelssohn en-

couraged him warmly in these literary pursuits, but Maimon never seems to have cordially taken to them. In Berlin he met with some 'gay companions,' as Rasselas would have said, and with them led a regular *vie de Bohème* for some time. He apparently could not make up his mind to settle down to any profession, and had given up his idea of becoming a doctor. As he says, 'I observed that the theory of medicine contains many departments as auxiliary services, each of which requires a specialist for its thorough mastery; while the practice of medicine implies a peculiar genius and faculty of judgment that are seldom to be met with. I observed also that the most of physicians take advantage of the ignorance of the public, etc.' And so he gave up the idea. What he *did* do, however, was to qualify as an apothecary, without, however, acquiring any practical acquaintance with drugs. At last Mendelssohn, losing patience with his clever but shiftless *protégé*, sent for him one day and laid before him an indictment, drawn up under three counts: (1) that he had not made up his mind to any plan of life; (2) that he was trying to spread dangerous opinions and systems; and (3) that, according to general rumour, he was leading a rather loose life, and was very much addicted to sensual pleasures. With regard to No. 1, Maimon replied that he was unadapted for practical life, and could only support himself by teaching; with regard to No. 2, he urged that his opinions were either true or false,—if the former, they could do no harm; if the latter, they might be refuted. But with regard to No. 3, he avowed that, like other folk, he was an Epicurean. He saw, however, that his stay in Berlin must come to an end, so he took farewell of all

his friends and departed to Hamburg. From Hamburg, he went to Holland and was received, thanks to his letters of recommendation, by a Jewish gentleman of Amsterdam. In his house he remained nine months, although some of his patron's relatives wished him to be driven away as a vile heretic. But having no definite occupation, he became very hypochondriacal and thought of committing suicide. On the occasion of the Feast of Haman, as he was returning in a half-intoxicated state along one of the canals, he bent down over the water and thrust his head and his shoulders in; but the rest of his anatomy refused to follow suit, all sense having apparently retired from the seat of understanding to that of his breeches, and so he remained some time, a ludicrous spectacle to gods and men. At length he saw the humour of the thing himself, and pulled himself up and went home to bed.

At the Hague he had a curious love-affair with an elderly spinster, who frankly made him one day a declaration of her affection. Solomon laughed in a heartless manner, whereupon the lady sent him a letter of fierce vituperation, to which he replied in the same strain, and so the matter ended. The concluding words of his note merit quotation. 'For the rest, Madam, as far as your revenge is concerned, I do not fear it, since Time, which destroys all things, has shattered your weapons, that is, your teeth and nails.' Caustic, but scarcely gentlemanly.

Soon after, he left Holland and returned to Hamburg. Then he thought he would turn Christian, as a means of bettering himself in the world. He accordingly drew up a confession

of faith, which for philosophic width of interpretation of Christian doctrine quite 'beats the record.' It took the breath away from the poor German schoolmaster, whom Maimon commissioned to write it out for him in German characters. Then he went and presented it to a Protestant clergyman who not unnaturally refused to receive so wide-minded a neophyte into the fold, and so poor Solomon bade the pastor goodbye. But, somehow or other, your born parasite always manages to secure a berth, and Maimon soon found himself under the protection of a certain Herr W., who looked after him and sent him to learn languages at the gymnasium. In the midst of these profitable pursuits, an incident occurred which much perturbed the worthy Solomon. His wife had sent a Polish Jew to bring her errant husband home, or else to compel him to grant her a divorce. But Solomon would do neither, and not all the pleadings or threatenings of the chief rabbi of the place could make him alter his determination. Shortly after he returned to Berlin. There he was commissioned by Mendelssohn and others to draw up a mathematical text-book for the Jews. Maimon did this, but when the work was finished his friends refused to pay for its publication. This was the occasion of a rupture, which ended in Solomon's departure from Berlin to Breslau. There he became tutor in a private family, and was getting on prosperously enough when again his *bête noire* presented itself in the shape of his wife in person, accompanied by his eldest son. 'She possessed the courage of an Amazon,' says Solomon, and succeeded in obtaining a divorce with which she returned with her son, whom his father had not succeeded in inducing to

remain with him, to Poland. Once more Maimon returned to Berlin. Here he began to study Kant's 'Kritik,' and made such progress in it that its author in a letter to a friend spoke of Maimon as his most promising disciple. This pleased him immensely, and gave him a stimulus to write philosophical disquisitions and articles on his own account, which secured him a high place among modern philosophers; and at this point we must take leave of our friend Solomon Maimon. As he says in the concluding paragraph of his autobiography: 'So much with regard to the events which have occurred in my life, the communication of which I thought might be not without use. I have not yet reached the haven of rest; but

*"Quā fata trahunt retrahuntque sequamur."*

The last scene of all is a curious and instructive one. Solomon is on his deathbed, and a kindly but unavoidably misguided pastor calls on him, and endeavours to make Solomon accept the doctrine of immortality. 'Ah!' replied the latter, 'these are beautiful dreams and hopes.' And, the pastor urging further that the hope of immortality brought peace, '*ich bin ruhig*' answered the dying man.

'He died at peace,' says the kindly clergyman, 'though I do not venture to say from what source the peace was derived.'

And so ends one of the quaintest and most interesting and indeed most amusing life-records ever written. Dr. Murray deserves the thanks of all students of out-of-the-way literature for his admirable translation of this fascinating autobiography.

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